Post 1990s Dance Theatre and (the idea of) the Neutral

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ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on the concept of neutrality in the works of contemporary European (post 1990s) choreographers. While broad ideas around neutrality are considered, the thesis primarily engages with Roland Barthes’ definition of neutrality as a structural term: ‘every inflection that, dodging or baffling the paradigmatic, oppositional structure of meaning, aims at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse’.

I argue that the minimalist work of Judson Church, New York City, is anticipating the interest in the neutral that will more strongly formulate itself in dance theatre after the 1990s. In the first chapter on Jérôme Bel, the concept of neutrality is introduced as a general idea, together with its inherent problem. The ‘problem’ is not that this or that element that Bel chooses cannot be perceived as neutral, but that neutral or stage zero can never be neutral enough. The second chapter, dedicated to the work of Thomas Lehmen, explores the idea of ‘neutralization’ in relation to the notion of the self in Lehmen’s performance, where ‘It is not I or you who lives: ‘one’ (une vie) lives in us’ (P. Hallward).

In the third chapter I argue that in Raimund Hoghe’s performances, love is conceived essentially as a balance between narcissism and pure object-love – as a neutral state. The fourth chapter, on Croatia’s BADco., gravitates around the ways in which group processes function, arguing that the idea of the neutral is located in the ‘invisible hand’ of emergence. The thesis shifts academic performance analysis towards a more concept-based approach, unpicking and/or constructing timeless, abstract and broad concepts and ideas that the work of these choreographers resonates with.

DECLARATION

I confirm that the work presented in the thesis is my own and that all references are cited accordingly.
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NOTES ON STYLE

The text of this thesis follows the conventions recommended by the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA).

The bibliography lists work cited in alphabetical order.
INTRODUCTION

On the Concept of the Neutral

0.1 Contexts
In June 2001, Jérôme Bel’s performance *The Show Must Go On* was presented in Zagreb as part of the 15th Eurokaz Festival. This was not the first time Bel’s work had been seen in Croatia. In fact, in May the same year, *Jérôme Bel* and *The Last Performance* were shown as part of the 18th Dance Week Festival. After seeing *Jérôme Bel*, some dancers in the audience complained about the fact that in a couple of days they would have to dance on the same floor in the Zagreb Youth Theatre where two of Bel’s performers had just urinated on stage. Other than that, reactions were mostly sympathetic, even from the more traditional Croatian dance critics such as Maja Đurinović, who thought Jérôme Bel’s performances were ‘becoming and sad, in a hopeless search for identity’, ¹ or Lidija Zozoli who argued that the way the naked body was shown in both performances ‘resisted any pornographic connotations’² whilst ‘the simplicity of scenic expression’ was ‘thrilling’ in this ‘exceptional, ironically tuned critique of consumerist society, the way relations operate and the way we relate to our bodies, where not even urination feels out of place’.³ Bel managed to win over most of the Croatian audience with *Jérôme Bel* and *The Last Performance*: the reaction to *The Show Must Go On* a month later, was, nevertheless, unexpected.

*The Show Must Go On* was staged in the imposing neo-baroque building of Hrvatsko narodno kazalište (HNK) – the Croatian National Theatre.

¹ Maja Đurinović, ‘Veza sa svijetom’, *Vijenac*, 190 (14 June 2001), also available here: http://www.matica.hr/Vijenac/Vij190.nsf/AllWebDocs/+Vezasasvijetom [accessed on 7 September 2010]. All translations from original Croatian sources are by the author of the thesis, except where marked.
² Lidija Zozoli, ‘Diskutabilna pripadnost’, *Vijenac*, 190 (14 June 2001), also available here: http://www.matica.hr/Vijenac/Vij190.nsf/AllWebDocs/+Diskutabilnapripadnost [accessed on 7 September 2010].
³ Lidija Zozoli, ‘Diskutabilna pripadnost’, *Vijenac*, 190 (14 June 2001), also available here: http://www.matica.hr/Vijenac/Vij190.nsf/AllWebDocs/+Diskutabilnapripadnost [accessed on 7 September 2010].
Image 1: The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb (photo by Franjo Marković)

Image 2: The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, interior (photo by Franjo Marković)
HNK was completed in 1895, and stylistically belongs to the period of late historicism. It was built by Ferdinand Fellner and Hermann Helmer who together designed around 50 theatre buildings in Central Europe, most of them in the Habsburg Empire. These theatre buildings served as a model of middle class theatre architecture as they were the temples of comfort and opulence for the new moneyed leisure classes. Their most distinguishing feature is the decorative plaster work on their yellow stucco façades, with neo-baroque details such as chubby angels blowing on trumpets on the inside of the building. Although built by a German and an Austrian architect, the theatre in Zagreb (as with those in Rijeka, Split and Osijek) represented the spirit of strengthening Croatian national identity\(^4\) against Austrian and Hungarian influences: an idea further supported by a ceremonial curtain with the painting of Croatian national revival\(^5\) by Vlaho Bukovac made for the opening of the building.

At the turn of the 21st century, the 1990s war in the Balkans was still fresh in everyone’s mind and bodies. Only a year before Bel’s performances in Zagreb, Croatia had finally voted out the ultra-conservative, nationalistic party Croatian Democratic Community (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica - HDZ) who had been in power since 1990, and replaced them with the more moderate Social Democrats. The 1990s in Croatia were stained with ‘scientific’ fabrications of Croatian history\(^5\) by the media and the government, whose main purpose was to

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\(^4\) As Ante Jakić, a member of the Parliament argues in his 1861 proposal to the Parliament of the Kingdom of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia: ‘It is a matter of common knowledge that a national theatre is one of the main conditions for the development of national pride and national consciousness, that we desperately need at the moment. However, our National Theatre is currently not financially supported in any way. It will not survive without support, thus myself and fifteen other members of Parliament propose that Parliament discusses this issue.’ in _Spisi saborski Sabora kraljevinah Dalmacije, Hrvatske i Slavonije od god. 1861_, ed. by Dragojo Kuslan and Mirko Suhaj (Zagreb: Tiskarnica Dra Ljudevitija Gaja, 1862), p. 46.

\(^5\) The Croatian national revival, also known as the Illyriad movement took shape in the 1830s and 1840s. Its goal was to resist ‘Hungarization’ (Hungarian was imposed as the official language in Croatia), to defend Croatian interests and to promote Croatian literature. Croatia perceived Hungary as ‘an alien nation trying to suppress their national identity’ so they were looking for linguistic and ethnic unity with the South Slavs in order to avoid Hungarian dominance (Jonathan Sperber, _The European Revolutions, 1848-1851_ [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005], p. 103).

\(^6\) The re-writing of ancient Croatian history, starting from the seventh century when Croats, together with other South Slaves, started settling in the Balkan Peninsula, became the question of utmost political importance. Some ‘theories’ even tried to argue that Croatians were, originally, an Iranian tribe, in order to ‘scientifically’ establish a genetic difference between Croatians and Serbs. See Mijo N. Ćurčić, _Staroizransko podrijetlo Hrvata_ (Zagreb: [n.p.], 1991) or Mirko Vidović, _Hrvatski iransi korijeni_ (Zagreb: Grgur Ninski, 1991).
articulate the independence and self-sufficiency of Croatian territory (as far back as it could possibly go). An independent arts and cultural scene (the civil sector) was weak because it did not get much financial support from the state. Effectively this meant that large scale artistic events were reduced to those under direct state patronage.\footnote{The Croatian cultural web portal Kulturpunkt is in the process of conducting a series of interviews under the title ‘In focus’ with the protagonists of the Croatian independent scene who all describe the situation in Croatia in the 1990s in terms of nationalism, xenophobia, anticommunism and isolation from the international artistic context. See http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/i/u_fokus/ [accessed 22 November 2010]. Here is what Goran Sergej Pristaš, the artistic director of the Centre for Drama Art said about the period: ‘It is important to note that the 1990s [in Croatia] were very tense. As we were collaborating with the Institute [Soroš Institute, see note 19 of this chapter], we were tapped. At that time I was involved with film. I got an offer from Jadran film [a film production company] to write a film script with an author I later realized was working for the police. He was involved in an investigation of the Institute in order to prove a financial fraud, which was, of course, not possible, because there was no financial fraud. […] The pressure was coming from the Minister of Culture, Zlatko Vitez, the police, even the Government and it was very hard to endure.’ (Goran Sergej Pristaš in an interview with Antonija Letinić, ‘Ispunjavanje praznina’, see http://www.kulturpunkt.hr/i/kulturoskop/410/ [accessed 22 November 2010].} The state was, for most of the decade, mainly focused on the hardships of wartime and economic restructuring. The attention was primarily on liberating the territory under Serbian occupation, easing the position of Croatian refugees from war zones such as Vukovar and Knin, and on the privatization of public property in the transition to capitalism. The government supported what they perceived as unproblematic artistic forms such as realism\footnote{Realistic representation in theatre in Croatia in the 1990s could be understood as fiercely ideological. As Marin Blažević argues, ‘The logosentric imperative and hierarchical organisation of the theological stage would be inefficient, however, were it not for the ‘fantasies’ and ‘therapeutic’ effects of realism. As an echo of the ‘call for order, a desire for unity, for identity, for security, or popularity’, realism ‘preserves various consciousnesses from doubt’. That is to say, by means of the ‘correct rules’, and using ‘the effects of reality’ realism stabilises and adjusts the referent ‘according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning’. […] realism provides – that is to say, stimulates and simulates – the identification of the truth-like sign and its referent: the dramatic fiction and the so-called referential reality; the author’s or the autocrat’s Word and the (represented) World; the Super-icon and Croatia.’ (Marin Blažević, ‘Dying bodies, living corpses: transition, nationalism and resistance in Croatian theatre’ in Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion, ed. by Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout [Abingdon: Routledge, 2006], pp. 87-106, [p. 89]).} or naïve art\footnote{Croatian naïve art or Hlebine school of naïve art is a Croatian version of a style of painting that broadly refers to the work of artists, also known as ‘modern primitives’, with no formal academic training in techniques of proportion and perspective. Regardless of what one thinks of its importance in 20th century art, for those in theatre and other artistic circles in Croatia interested in post-dramatic art, naïve art became the symbol of Croatian art’s dedication to tradition, and of its fossilization in time. The term ‘post-dramatic’, introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book Postdramatic Theatre (first published in Germany in 1999) became the key term in Croatia to describe the works of a number of Croatian artists from a younger generation (born early 1970s onwards). These circles included organizations such as Centre for Drama Art (CDU) that, regardless of its name, engaged with the promotion of post-dramatic art, the journal Frakecija, the curatorial collective WHW – What, how and for whom, Platform 9.81, the Multimedia institute, the Kontejner, Urban Festival, BLOK, Bacaći sjenki and Arkzin. Because of the fact that the} which
were thought of as representative of ‘contemporary’ Croatia. The dominant idea of the state and the media was to ideologically re-construct Croatia as a country as different as possible from its Eastern neighbours, especially Serbia, and to align it with the West; not however with the decadent West of body art, conceptual art and experimental performance work, but with the decent, bourgeois West of, for instance, mainstream opera. International festivals like Eurokaz (which in 1997 programmed artists such as Annie Sprinkle, Ron Athey, Orlan, Franko B, Gekidan Kaitaisha) were subsequently subject to strong criticism even from the liberal press. For instance, the theatre critic Nataša Govediċ who writes for the left-wing Novi list argued that the way Eurokaz treated the body ‘did not give birth to a single positive thing’ and asked whether ‘Eurokaz can step out of its obsessions with aggression and destruction’ and whether it can ‘encourage less psychotic and chaotic research’.

In that very same National Theatre where The Show Must Go On was performed, President Tudman’s birthday had been publicly celebrated in 1997. The celebration was directed by Zlatko Vitez, a theatre director and actor (also the Minister of Culture 1994-1995), and paid for with taxpayers money. This was a symbolic act underlying what Marin Blažević has identified as ‘the mechanisms of representation through which theatre and theatre-like performances reflect and reinforce the concept and practice of the kind of dictatorship (or democracy) developed in transitional Croatia’. Blažević names the theatre of the 1990s in Croatia a ‘theological stage’ with

the writer as the One who created and rules the wor(l)d; the director as privileged interpreter and re-creator of His wor(l)d on the (theatrical) stage, the invisible representative of the supervisory authorial function whose power is being implanted into the performing bodies; the actor as executor, trapped in the course of a fictional story and a theatrical illusion with an utterly reduced right of speech; and finally the nameless and silent spectators, representatives of the people squeezed together in the dark auditorium.

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Croatian cultural scene is very small, it is also very interdisciplinary, and many organizations from different fields regularly collaborate in creating work.


12 Ibid.,p. 89.
The Croatia of the 1990s, not unlike most post-communism countries in that period, did not perform the transition to capitalism very well. According to politician and sociologist Vesna Pusić, the breakdown of the communist system and the arrival of democratic election procedures in Croatia resulted in a ‘dictatorship with democratic legitimacy’ where democratic institutions were combined with a ‘political culture inherited from the totalitarian period’.\(^\text{13}\) It was in this atmosphere and this cultural context that Jérôme Bel staged his ‘dance’ performance *The Show Must Go On*: five minutes of complete darkness while the audience listened to Simon & Garfunkel’s song *The Sound of Silence*.\(^\text{14}\) This was followed by *Let the Sunshine In* (from the musical *Hair*) while the lights were slowly turned on. The rest of the performance consisted solely of a simple and literal *showing*, demonstrating the refrain of the songs that were played. At the opening the audience sat in darkness so thick we could not see a finger in front of our face, let alone the stage, which is, presumably, what we come to see in the theatre. Everything that followed was a symbolic equivalent of showing the middle finger, or putting the final nail into the conservative government’s coffin. It was also a slap in the face for ‘official’ art in Croatia obsessed with realistic representation, with attempts to deal with the war - or to avoid it through the escapism of romantic dance of far away lands.\(^\text{15}\) In the first ten minutes of the performance, there was nothing to *see* on stage. *Nothing*. No personal or national conflicts, no complicated stage design, no elaborate costumes, no convoluted storylines, entwined genealogies or *landscapes of longing*. It was as if someone was ridiculing the audience, the building, the act of going to the theatre and dance as a virtuosic art, defying everything that Croatia has been through in the 1990s and art as a ‘serious’ business. At one point in the performance, the auditorium lights were turned on and audience members rose up from their seats and started dancing. As Gerald Siegmund said, the bodies on stage were non-theatrical and

\(^{13}\) Vesna Pusić, *Demokracije i diktature* (Zagreb: Durieux, 1998), pp. 68-80 (p. 183).

\(^{14}\) *The Show Must Go On* was not made for the Croatian context, or with the Croatian context in mind. Nevertheless, it had a lot of impact on the Croatian (performing) art scene.

\(^{15}\) A number of dance performances that were produced by the official Croatian dance ensemble Zagrebački plesni ansambl (ZPA) - Zagreb Dance Ensemble - in the 1990s were decoratively representing some unidentified longing detached from the reality or from the current situation, and portrayed some non-existent fantasized spaces of soul (*The Rush of the Soul* [2001]), longing (*Hunters of Longing* [1998]), memory (*At Memory’s Fingertips* [1999]), ‘longing for beauty and the return to the idyllic landscapes’ (*Recognizing Landscapes* [1996]) (Hrvoje Ivančković in *Slobodna Dalmacija* [2 December 1996]).
easily replaceable with the bodies of the audience, while the bodies in the audience were ‘performing’ the audience.  
16 Slightly later, when the lights in the auditorium were lowered, the audience began igniting their lighters and waving them, as if they were at a rock concert. It was fun. It was liberating. It made me feel normal, as if a new period was about to start, a period in which the effects of the war, boiling tensions between regional neighbours, nationalistic pride and aggression would be neutralized. It symbolised a moment where the younger generation in Croatia was now allowed to engage with art freed from the burden of a problematic war-torn past, and released from the pressure to describe that period, perpetuate its narrative, tell stories about it, or be perceived as a victim of it. At the end of The Show Must Go On the audience stood up and cheered. There was a strong sense of exhilaration that somebody had dared to do such a ‘silly’ thing at the Croatian National Theatre, a ‘serious’ institution representative of a ‘serious’ country that had been through a ‘serious’ period of ‘serious’ pain.

There was also, however, something else that Bel was offering, behind the initial exhilaration of the moment. His performance suggested an image of the self as free and independent, unrestricted by the attachments of custom, tradition and inherited status, able to mock both and refashion them to his own liking, unrestrained by well-established conventional (moral) values. That self was cast as the only author of any obligations that (s)he decides to constrain himself/herself with. Although The Show Must Go On relied heavily on the use of popular songs embedded in collective memory, the way Bel used and abused them was not in order to pay respect to history and tradition. Instead, Bel was creating a narration in his performance, limiting those songs to events in his narrative. This procedure suggested a self-image that took for granted the dignity of being an agent and not just an instrument of the goals that were set by another. In short, what Bel brought along with his performance was a highly developed and well practised liberal ethics. It is not surprising that those values came with contemporary dance, because contemporary dance is, as Emil Hrvatin argues, ‘the

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most Western art of all artistic genres – it is the art of developed Western democracies’.17

0.2 Introducing the neutral
This thesis will explore the work of the French choreographer Jérôme Bel, the German choreographers Thomas Lehmen and Raimund Hoghe, and the Croatian dance and performance company BADco. in relation to the concept of the neutral and its ambivalences. It seems odd to start a thesis on the concept of the neutral in contemporary dance by describing a moment of exhilaration and yet, I have deliberately chosen to start with something that disturbs our habitual thinking about the notion of the neutral. What is the neutral? How can we think the neutral? Roland Barthes defines neutrality as ‘every inflection that, dodging or baffling the paradigmatic, oppositional structure of meaning, aims at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse’.18 The 1990s in Croatia were ideologically organized into clear-cut divisions yielding extremely polarized positions. Serbia was bad: Croatia was good. Patriotism was good and a sign of respectability; being unpatriotic was bad. Capitalism was good; communism was bad. Christianity was good; being an atheist or Orthodox was bad. The Croatian Democratic Community was good, the Social Democrats were bad because they were ex-communists. West was good; East was bad. Franjo Tudman was good; George Soros19 was bad. Sides were important, and you wouldn’t want to find yourself on the wrong side.20 There was no space for ‘baffling the oppositional

19 George Soros is an American currency speculator of Hungarian origin, stock investor, businessman, philanthropist, and liberal political activist, a proponent of human rights and the ‘open society’. He was an immensely important figure in the Balkans and in other transitional countries because he funded various programs, independent media and organisations that were critical of the new governments after the break down of communism. Through his Open Society Institute’s (previously known as the Soros Institute) various cultural and social programs, he was involved in deliberate and continuous efforts to strengthen civil society. Most Croatian NGOs were initiated with Soros’ funding. President Tudman indirectly referred to him as a devil in his infamous speech at Zagreb’s Pleso Airport on 23 November 1996. The full speech in Croatian can be found here: http://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/Govor_Franje_Tu%C4%8Dmana_u_Zra%C4%8Dnoj_luci_Zagreb_23._studenog_1996. [accessed 10 September 2010].
20 I am aware of the fact that I am portraying a rather generalized image of Croatia here, but Croatia was subjected to gross ideological generalizations, simplifications and prejudices in the period I am describing. I am trying to depict the Zeitgeist of the 1990s. The other thing worth
structure of meaning’ because a strong government created the need for a strong opposition. The Centre for Drama Art (CDU), the main Croatian institution for the promotion of experimental and post-dramatic performance, founded in 1995, also grew into an NGO based on donations from the Soros Institute. Even today, 15 years later, you can still sense in the language of their website the remnants of that oppositional discourse, the attempts to awaken the dead and to dismiss the putrid corpse of Tudman’s democratic dictatorship:

The CDU has grown out of the necessity to break through the monotony and artificial tempo of the Croatian performing arts scene. […] The CDU strives to open up new possibilities for the breakthrough of serious performative thought and action into those areas that do not expect their surfacing. Under ‘serious’ we mean the indispensable nature of individual performances, projects, concepts and opinions, and by ‘surfacing’ a protuberance into the static staging of the Croatian art scene.21

The need to provide an opposition to mainstream theatre practice - which was related to a particular political ideology as well - was the leading impulse and took many forms. It also gave birth to a desire to baffle and confuse the binaries in the form of the neutral. Such a polarized society provoked a desire for ‘normalization’, for a particular type of sympathy towards ‘taking various sides into consideration’, that was strongly present throughout the 2000s in Croatia. However, this need had nothing to do with ‘mainstream’ or ‘middle-of-the-road ideas’, which, as I explained, in the 1990s were linked to extreme nationalism, realism in art, and polarized oppositions. In 1990s Croatia ‘mainstream’ was the political right. The independent cultural scene was attempting to move the ‘mainstream’ towards the centre, but similarly was weary of the ‘conservative

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21 From the website of Centre for Drama Art (CDU), [http://www.cdu.hr/about/index.htm](http://www.cdu.hr/about/index.htm) [accessed on 10 September 2010].
ideology of normalization’. The paradox of the independent scene was that it had to fight for the neutralization of discourse, even though it didn’t want to ‘neutralize’ the problems that Croatia was facing in the 1990s. The independent scene was trying to do what the State wasn’t capable of doing - fighting to draw a distinction between a legal structure that supports basic rights and liberties, and the conception of the good life that people are entitled to pursue within that structure. It was trying to support a fair structure, a neutral framework on the grounds that, firstly, people should be free to form their own opinions, and secondly, that free speech will improve the general welfare of the nation (which is not neutral, because it is a value judgment). The independent scene wasn’t ready to give up on a preferred conception of the good, and yet understood that it is more urgent to create a fair, neutral framework within which individuals and groups can choose their own values and ends, because the State was not doing that. There was a strong need for a change in what Raymond Williams would call a structure of feeling that cried for the appearance of the neutral.

Williams’ ‘structure of feeling’ is one of these terms equivalent to the idea of discourse, ideology, world vision or even Zeitgeist. Williams defines a structure of feeling as follows:

In principle, it seems clear that the dramatic conventions of any given period are fundamentally related to the structure of feeling in that period. […] In the study of a period, we may be able to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the material life, the social organization, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas. […] To relate a work of art to any part of that observed totality may, in varying degrees, be useful, but it is a common experience, in analysis, to realize that when one has measured the work against the separable parts, there yet remains some element for which there is no external counterpart. This element, I believe, is what I have named

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23 Croatian President Tudman did not understand the basic legal framework within which he was operating. He was entirely incapable of making a distinction between his own values and the operations of the state apparatus. The following anecdote makes it clear that he wanted to abolish even the democratic legitimacy of his dictatorship. In 1995, Tudman refused to recognize the results of the 1995 local elections that brought victory to his political opponents in Zagreb. Tudman was arguing that ‘We cannot allow an oppositional situation in the capital of Croatia – this would disturb the stability of Croatia.’ (Tudman quoted in Ozren Žunec, Rat i društvo: ogledi iz sociologije vojske i rata [Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 1998], p. 145), quote translated by Marin Blažević.
the structure of feeling of a period and it is only realizable through experience of the work of art itself, as a whole.\(^{24}\)

Williams talks about the structure of feeling of a period, and in that sense, the structure of feeling of the 1990s in Croatia was precisely the feeling of being locked in the heated, radical tensions between opposites on the one hand, and on the other, in realism and dramatic mode in the theatre. According to Williams, the structure of feeling ‘[…] lies deeply embedded in our lives; it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art – and this is the importance of art – that it can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience.’\(^{25}\) That structure of feeling and social consciousness in Croatia started to change during the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21\(^{st}\) century. Bel’s performance at the Croatian National Theatre (HNK), I would argue, marks that shift.

The artists that I will explore in this thesis and the idea of the neutral are a reflex of that general inclination towards the normalization of Croatian society, and an art that could accommodate those interests. So to return to Roland Barthes, the concept of the neutral isn’t in contradiction with highly charged emotions. As Barthes claims, ‘[m]y definition of the Neutral remains structural. By which I mean that, for me, the Neutral doesn’t refer to “impressions” of grayness, of “neutrality”, of indifference. The Neutral – my Neutral – can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states’.\(^{26}\) Indeed, there was something that was structurally changing at the basis of Croatian society that generated a positive reception for works like that of Bel, mentioned at the opening of this thesis. The neutral offers a moment which attempts to establish itself through a restraint from engagement – a one-sided engagement that manifests itself as a plain aggression, intensity or forcefulness. In the neutral, the conflicting sides continue to exist, but in suspension, pending, held in the mid-air above the ground. While *The Show Must Go On* and the audience’s reaction announced that the period of normalization was on its way, other examples of Bel’s works, especially *Jérôme Bel*, dealt with the suspension and the undecidability characteristic of the neutral: the moment

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 40.
when we are not yet sure what is going on, the moment of insecurity, but also of
the refusal to decide between the opposing positions. The idea of the neutral exists
only as a consequence of oppositions, not prior to them or regardless of them –
you can’t be neutral before the war has started. The neutral always comes after:
after the conflict, after the polarization, after the horror. The neutral doesn’t hurt.
Anymore. The neutral is thus primarily significant as a structural term, and not in
its ’appearances’ or ’representations’ (such as ‘impressions of grayness or
indifference’), even though these ’appearances’ function as invocations, a
signalling of the ’neutral as structural’.

0.3 The historical neutral – a methodological note
At the heart of this thesis lies a structural understanding of the notion of the
neutral which draws on Barthes, and which problematizes the idea of historical
development or of any kind of progress, and operates synchronically rather than
diachronically. This thesis focuses on abstract concepts, which are, to a large
extent, indifferent to the idea of historical progress. Although this thesis does not
wish to completely deny the idea of the causal or chronological development, it is
important also to stress a different type of approach as well: the idea of the neutral
also resists an idea of historical development that would indicate some sort of
improvement. That does not mean that the idea of the neutral does not operate
differently in different historical contexts, and that different contexts are not an
important element in its perception. In addition to problematizing the historical
perspective and chronological development in terms of artists’ development, this
thesis also presumes another approach: a different type of time perception, a
contradictory one, which is based on the idea that time is not linear and does not
have a beginning or an end. The meaning of an idea, therefore, should not be
located in either its origins or its ends. This second perception of time is
fundamentally nonlinear or non-chronological: it is not rendered as a history of
progress or as a progression. It recurs rather than evolves. Even those who are
attempting to defend the idea of progress in the Arts, such as Maarten Doorman,
need to admit that ‘[c]hange still exists, but the strait-jacket of historical
development does not: what remains is the combining and re-combining of well-known forms’.27

This, however, does not mean that the idea of the neutral is suprahistorical or timeless. It does not mean that it denies the idea of change,28 or that it reduces the idea of change to the act of worship of historical monuments, or of its opposite: a sense of ‘advancement’ that the idea of the future seduces us into believing in. There is no point in searching for the origins of the idea of the neutral, because that would mean trying to recover the image of an ideal behind appearances, a Platonic order of representation or some sort of essence. I would like to avoid reducing historical changes, or the heterogeneity of time to a closed totality with a beginning and an end.

4. Definitions as concepts

The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who in times of great moral crises maintain their neutrality (quote popularly attributed to both Dante Alighieri and Martin Luther King, Jr)29

I would like to now look into the general cultural history of the notion of the neutral in the 20th century. As an adjective, according to Oxford English

Dictionary, neutral has two meanings30

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28 In a contrary fashion, my first four chapters do approach the body of the work of the authors that I am writing about chronologically, and they do emphasize, especially the chapter on Jérôme Bel, the idea that the new definitions of dance were being constructed as the reaction to what was previously understood under the notion of dance. I am arguing that we should stay with the paradox, rather than try to decide for either approach.
29 Those were not Dante’s exact words. This is what he wrote: ‘As the two poets enter the vestibule that leads to Hell itself, Dante sees the inscription above the gate, and he hears the screams of anguish from the damned souls. Rejected by God and not accepted by the powers of Hell, the first group of souls are ‘nowhere’, because of their cowardly refusal to make a choice in life. […] And I, in the midst of all this circling horror, began, ‘Teacher, what are these sounds I hear? What souls are these so overwhelmed by grief?’ And he to me: This wretched state of being is the fate of those sad souls who lived a life but lived it with no blame and with no praise. They are mixed with that repulsive choir of angels Neither faithful nor unfaithful to their God, Who undecided [my emphasis] stood but for themselves. Heaven, to keep its beauty, cast them out, but even Hell itself would not receive them, for fear the damned might glory over them. And I. ‘Master, what tortures do they suffer That force them to lament so bitterly?” He answered: ‘I will tell you in a few words: These wretches have no hope of truly dying, And this blind life they lead is so abject it makes them envy every other fate. (Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. by Mark Musa (London: Penguin Classics, 2003.), Canto III, lines 31–48 (pp. 89–91).)
30 Oxford English Dictionary, [http://www.oed.com/](http://www.oed.com/). I quote dictionaries on several occasions in this thesis, not because I think they are infallible authorities, but because they are good at pointing
1 not helping or supporting either of two opposing sides, esp. countries at war; impartial: during the Second World War Portugal was neutral.
• belonging to an impartial party, country, or group: on neutral ground.
• unbiased; disinterested: neutral, expert scientific advice.

2 having no strongly marked or positive characteristics or features: the tone was neutral, devoid of sentiment | a fairly neutral background will make any small splash of color stand out.

As a noun, a neutral stands for:

1 an impartial and uninvolved country or person: he acted as a neutral between the parties | Sweden and its fellow neutrals.
• an unbiased person.
2 a neutral color or shade, esp. light gray or beige.
3 a disengaged position of gears in which the engine is disconnected from the driven parts: she slipped the gear into neutral.
4 an electrically neutral point, terminal, conductor, or wire.

If we look into the OED thesaurus, the following synonyms and antonyms appear for the adjective neutral.

1 a neutral judge impartial, unbiased, unprejudiced, objective, open-minded, nonpartisan, disinterested, dispassionate, detached, impersonal, unemotional, indifferent, uncommitted. antonym biased, partisan.
2 Switzerland remained neutral unaligned, nonaligned, unaffiliated, unallied, uninvolved; noncombatant. antonym partisan, combatant.
3 a neutral topic of conversation inoffensive, bland, unobjectionable, unexceptionable, anodyne, unremarkable, ordinary, commonplace; safe, harmless, innocuous. antonym provocative, offensive.

to what is generally accepted as an idea. I am very interested in a social agreement on what things are and it seems to me that dictionaries reflect that convention to a large extent.
4 a neutral background pale, light; beige, cream, taupe, oatmeal, ecru, buff, fawn, gray; colorless, uncolored, achromatic; indeterminate, insipid, nondescript, dull, drab. antonym bright, colorful.

From this list of meanings we can deduce three main ‘states’ of neutrality. The first one refers to the refusal to take sides between two opposing ideas, forces, or parties. Such an understanding of the term can refer to a very concrete, practical and material situation, but could also be understood as a structural, conceptual and immaterial notion. That means that it allows us to abstract from the particular circumstances of the practice of neutrality (for instance, Switzerland as a neutral party during the First and the Second World War), into the concept of the neutral. The second one refers to a non-state: neutral as having no qualities of its own. This state is the most difficult one to ‘do’ or ‘materialize’, because it marks a non-state, an absence. It refers to the lack of something, and this lack is unspecific, because it attempts to be the lack of everything, or a complete absence. Finally, the third one refers to the image of neutrality, the look of the neutral which is described by adjectives such as grey, beige, pale, cream, colourless. This term does retain some materiality and concreteness, in the sense that it can stand for certain colours, but it also stands for the absence of colour.

If we think about the neutral in the first sense, as the refusal to decide between two opposing sides, the neutral could be thought of as the most unstable position of the three. It could be read as ‘not – yet - decided’, with the emphasis on ‘yet’: the state of being in limbo. The neutral position, undecided as it is, is not of the same ontological status as the other two. It is not an alternative to the other two, it refuses to define itself as either of the two, but doesn’t really articulate its position either, other than that it isn’t what the other two are. The neutral can only be between the two already existing notions or ideas: it has no existence in and of itself. It is characterised by its own in-betweenness. This lack of characteristics is replaced by a strictly defined position as its main feature. The neutral is not therefore defined by its characteristics, but by its position: the position of in-betweenness, of an equal distance from both of the opposing terms. The neutral is dependent on what is already there, and positions itself in relation to that. It is a weak term, both because of the balance (or equal distance) that is hard to achieve
while two forces are pulling in opposite directions, but also because of its inability to speak for itself, without the haunting presence of the other two notions.

Not all of the terms used to describe the term neutral are entirely neutral. Some of the synonyms seem to lean towards the positive (especially according to the values of Western culture), such as unbiased, un-prejudiced, open-minded, inoffensive, safe, harmless, innocuous. Other terms gravitate towards the negative, such as: detached, unemotional, uncommitted, indifferent, unexceptionable, unremarkable, ordinary, dull, drab. In fact, it seems that the neutral often has difficulties remaining ‘neutral’. It seems to be constantly involved in its own re-evaluation. During the 20th century the term ‘neutral’ went from being regarded as a more positive term in modern art practices (as with the neutral mask, for instance), towards being exposed as a more negative term by postmodernist thinkers (especially in feminist readings), a term that craves an uncovering or unmasking - a term that needs to be revealed for what it truly is: only its own mask, never really itself.

I would like to indicate two key moments in the modernist representation of neutrality that treat neutrality as a predominately positive term, standing for an activity that should be practiced in particular circumstances. In both cases, the activity of being neutral is seen as valuable. One is specifically related to the field of theatre and performance, whilst the other comes from psychoanalysis. These two moments are especially important because they have their resonance in the works I will explore later.

0.5 The neutral mask

The first key moment is articulated by Jacques Copeau in 1917. He was the first practitioner to argue for the appeal of the neutral in the theatre. He started with the stage: ‘I want the stage to be naked and neutral […] in order that every delicacy may appear there, in order that every fault may stand out; in order that the dramatic work may have a chance in this neutral atmosphere to fashion that
individual garment which it knows how to put on’. However, his main focus was on the actor. Apart from attempting to present the stage ‘in the raw’, he was also trying to get the actor to engage with the similar or analogous action of stripping naked. This articulation of the desire for the neutral was the consequence of an attempt to escape convention. The neutral mask signifies a break with the everyday and the habitual. Coupeau considered ‘convention’ to be an impediment for the actor’s performance, and he argued for the casting aside of habitual behaviour(s). Before engaging with the material, the actor was expected to come to the starting point, to reach the condition in which he is filled with energy, yet is still. The neutral mask stands for a stillness before movement. Coupeau was looking for ‘the very first point’:

To start from silence and calm. That is the very first point. An actor must know how to be silent, to listen, to answer, to remain motionless, to start a gesture, follow through with it, come back to motionlessness and silence, with all the shadings and half-tones that these actions imply.

In order to facilitate this search for neutrality, Coupeau conceived a process in which the actors were encouraged to work with masks. The neutral mask was primarily a training tool for Coupeau and, subsequently, influenced the work of both Etienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq. The mask, rather than hiding the actor, was in fact doing the opposite. Decroux says ‘Masks make things worse […] It’s like lighting. We see everything you do clearly. And the moment you wear a mask, especially [a neutral] mask, we see the quality of what you’re doing.’

Wearing Lecoq’s masque neuter, the actor is supposed to be relieved from cultural, physical, social and other types of conditioning. The actor is required to become a blank sheet of paper, a tabula rasa. In terms of physical activity, in order to be in the neutral state, the actor is only expected to use the amount of energy that the action requires. Not more, nor less.

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32 Ibid., pp. 121-122.
The training with the neutral mask is executed in such a way that the teacher does not offer any suggestions on what to do, but points out mistakes once the actor makes them. Through that process of failure, neutrality is activated. All actions that are not necessary are considered to be failures. Lecoq attempted to conceptualize the idea of the neutral as a mirror state, the state of reflection, the abandonment of personal traits: ‘When the neutral mask sees the sea, it becomes the sea.’\(^{34}\) Or in the words of Richard Hayes-Marshall, contemporary director and mask teacher: ‘A good neutral mask looks like the person who puts it on.’\(^{35}\) But what was also clear, even for Coupeau, but especially Lecoq, is that there is something impossible about the neutral. For him, the neutral mask tends towards a ‘fulcrum point which doesn’t exist’.\(^{36}\) Also, the neutral mask is being used in the process of learning how to perform, but it is not the final goal. ‘The neutral mask is a way of understanding performance, not a way of performing. The mask is a tool for analyzing the quality of the body’s action.’\(^{37}\) A similar attitude was adopted by Meyerhold, who was also trying to release the body from the excesses of gesture for gesture’s sake and attempting to make movement on stage as precise as possible. One of the ways of escaping the superfluous was to make oneself aware of habitual actions, actions that are performed unconsciously. Meyerhold’s student Bogdanov used to cry *stoika!* to remind the actors of the need for constant physical attentiveness. Jonathan Pitches offers a description of *stoika* (or stance):

For the stoika (or stance) the knees must be soft (that is, unlocked), the legs shoulder – width apart and the body erect. Arms are left relaxed by the sides of the body but under control, not swinging. [All additional actions, or movements beyond those demanded by the exercise, are to be eradicated.] By insisting on this working position throughout his workshops, Bogdanov deliberately creates a culture of self-consciousness, focusing attention on his participants’ own physical behaviour and encouraging them to rationalise it.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{37}\) Ibid., p. 127.

In these terms modernism is aware of the impossibility of the realisation of the neutral. Yet however impossible it is in its full realisation, however self-defeating the term sounds, training with the neutral mask remains active to this day. Indeed, it has been central to a major strand in performance work, inspiring not only mask work, but mime and physical theatre as well. However complex and paradoxical the term is, the practice of it seems to be fruitful and inspirational. Also, it is the practice that enables the realisation of the state: it is through the practice that the body becomes ‘attuned’ to the performance of the neutral as the first step towards the performance of something that is no longer neutral. At this stage, and as a part of this understanding, the neutral is a stepping-stone towards something else, it is not a goal in itself. Also, the neutral is reached as a state of stripping away what is already there, in an attempt to reach the stage ‘before contamination’ with convention.

The view of the neutral that Copeau mentions in the quote at the beginning of this section is highly reminiscent of the way Jérôme Bel describes what he attempted to do with his performance Jérôme Bel. It is similar to the search for emptiness, for the restrained expression, for the ‘degree zero’ that Bel is engaged with. The main difference is that Bel decided to go a step further than Copeau. The stage zero in his work is not just a preparation for the performance, a rehearsal, or a stage in the learning process to create a piece of work. The stage zero is the work itself. Also, the stage zero, or the neutral in Bel’s work and in the work of the choreographers that I am researching is not only related to the actor and his state, but to the way the whole performance communicates. Copeau’s view of the neutral will also be traced in Lehmen’s Schreibstück (2002), where the work is so conceived that it is not even supposed to be learned from the choreographer but read from the book, as a set of instructions and performed in a detached manner, without a particular engagement, more as the marking of an idea, rather than as a lived experience. BADco.’s Deleted Messages (2004) places the viewer in a seemingly sterile, non-identifiable situation that deliberately reminds the viewer

40 See p. 86 of this thesis for a full quote.
of a non-place, a place without characteristics, a neutral space. Hoghe’s position and his way of performing brings us back to the actor’s neutral: the neutral of the performer performing, the dead-pan manner of presenting.

0.6 Psychoanalysis and the neutral

The second moment in modernism which adopts the idea of the neutral, is the way, characteristic of classical psychoanalysis, in which analysts position themselves in relation to their patients. Classical psychoanalysis believes that the behaviour of the analyst during sessions should be neutral. Psychoanalysts should not attempt to influence the speaker in any way. Even their position in the room where they are conducting their sessions is indicative of the withdrawal from influence: while the patient lies on a couch, the analyst sits behind the patient’s head, so that the patient cannot see him or her. Not being able to see the analyst, it is argued that the patient is not influenced by the analyst’s reactions. The patient is required to free-associate, to talk freely about whatever comes to his mind without trying to control the flow of his or her thoughts. The psychoanalyst sits in silence, listens carefully to what the patient is saying and takes notes.

Freud argued that analysts should be able to mirror the client’s reactions, by showing them only what is shown to them.\(^{41}\) One of the reasons why the analyst should remain neutral is to do with the process of transference. In order for the patient to be able to transfer his or her feelings onto the analyst, the analyst needs to assume the position of neutrality. Classical psychoanalysis thus believes that transferences can occur uninfluenced by the analyst or his or her activities. That is also why the analyst needs to confine his comments only to interpretations in relation to the psychoanalytic process. In the transference, the patient should be able to displace his or her feelings for the people who were close to him in his or her early childhood onto the analyst.\(^ {42}\) The neutrality of the psychoanalyst is even included in the definition of what psychoanalysis is. According to Merton M. Gill, ‘[p]sychoanalysis is that technique which, employed by a neutral analyst, results in the development of a regressive transference neurosis and the ultimate


\(^ {42}\) Ibid., p. 308.
resolution of this neurosis by techniques of interpretation alone’. The neutral in psychoanalysis will be especially important in the chapter on Raimund Hoghe, who is not entirely accepted in the ‘canon’ of ‘conceptual dancers’ because his work is soaked with complex emotional conditions and not particularly interested in word play, paronomasia, and the links between the visual and language which Lepecki argues are one of the key features of ‘conceptual dance’.

0.7 The neutral and the objective

Neutrality has often been described as impossible, or as an ideal. The idea of (the) neutral is almost like a ‘metaphor with ontological pretensions’. It never sounds quite real, but rather almost like an abstract ideal. It was only, however, in the context of postmodernism and a constructivist rejection of positivism that it began acquiring a more sinister note.

For instance, Freud was criticized for ‘unacknowledged value judgments, that had been masquerading as a value-neutral theory, (supposedly) based entirely on the empirical data of the analytic treatment experience, fused with the (supposedly) value-neutral ”scientific worldview”.’

One of the main theses of postmodernism is that science is not an objective epistemological practice that manages to go beyond personal, cultural, historical and social influences. There is no chance of perceiving a reality uncontaminated by the observer himself or the methods of observation she uses. The (false) neutrality of reality is formed as a consequence of particular circumstances and specific settings that influence the scientist and the writer, rather than as its

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45 This syntagme is used by Darrel Abel, to describe Hawthorne’s understanding of what he was attempting to do with The Scarlet Letter: ‘He [Hawthorne] wrote in the “Custom-House” introduction to The Scarlet Letter that his intention was to establish “a neutral territory somewhere between the real world and fairy-land.” Terence Martin has remarked that “Hawthorne’s neutral territory has only a metaphorical existence; but as a metaphor with ontological pretensions, it held a fret attraction to him.” (Darrel Abel, The Moral Picturesque: Studies in Hawthorne’s Fiction (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1988), pp. 48-49.
transcendence. There can, therefore, be no objective, neutral observation and theorizing.47

One of the primary attacks or unmaskings of the perception of neutral discourse comes from feminism. Luce Irigaray claims that the discourse that likes to advocate itself as neutral, is in fact masculine/masculinized. The neutral has been fully inhabited and appropriated by the male. The dominant language(s) and languages of privilege (scientific, objective, disinterested, impartial discourses) have attempted for a long time to keep ‘the man’ outside of language, or rather, not to acknowledge his presence in it, trying deliberately to hide it. It is in their interest to hide and disguise subjectivity, so that the claim for ‘universal’ can be made and upheld. And the model for the universal is the male. Luce Irigaray goes even further. She claims that the attempt for appropriation of the neutered position by dominant discourses, especially those of science, is in fact ‘an attempt to claim for man-made discourses the power of nature. The sexed being who says I is displaced by an apparently extra-human unsexed power that says it is so, and this is a powerful tool because there is a sense in which saying that something is so appears to make it so’.48 Irigaray connects neutral or impersonal discourse (as in phrases such as ‘it is raining, it is snowing’) with masculinity. Male discourse appropriates the position of the neutral.

A language divested of all pathos, absolutely neutral and detached, is transmitted by someone to someone else, who has no acknowledged origin or source either. This language is supposedly a translator, or a perfect translation, and adequate copy of the universe, and today, of the subject as well. The formula, its mechanics, and its machinery are supposedly enough. No more creation of life. Everything has already been realized in sterile duplications. The subject has become a machine, with no becoming – finished.49

Irigaray is verbalizing the protest against the universalization of discourse, which, according to her, always leads to the end of creation and sterility. Peggy Phelan summarizes it as follows:

As Lacanian psychoanalysis and Derridean deconstruction have demonstrated, the epistemological, psychic, and political binaries of Western metaphysics create distinctions and evaluations across two terms. One term of the binary is marked with value, the other is unmarked. The male is marked with value; the female is unmarked, lacking measured value and meaning. Within this psycho-philosophical frame, cultural reproduction takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her, rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value, is left unmarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she whom he marks.  

So the male has resumed the territory of two, both the male and the neutral, while a woman can only be a woman. However, this appropriation of the term neutral by the male should be transgressed. The neutral is a relational term, not a term that describes identities. As I have indicated, there are two ways of connecting with the idea of the neutral that will be useful to think about in this study. One, which I would like to emphasize is the idea of a structural neutral – that which is undecided between two positions and constantly balances them out, without establishing a third position other than through a *via negativa*. The other is the idea of the neutral as that which functions as a benevolent mirror image to the Other (concept, person, position, performance), as a teacher and his or her pupil. It is the relational neutral: in conversation with the other what can be created between us is the state of the neutral – if I want to hear you, I need to meet you half way. There are also two more ways of understanding the neutral and they are connected. One is that the neutral is unachievable, but is more of an inclination, a tendency. The other is that it is more of a process than a position: a process of neutralising, rather than a positioning of the neutral as a noun. Thus the main emphasis is on a process, on going somewhere, rather than on fully realizing the position. It is a tendency, a pull.

If we understand modernism as a series of transhistorical traits, then it makes sense to call Augusto Boal’s usage of the idea of neutrality modernistic as well.

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As Philip Auslander discusses, Boal seems to suggest that the body can adopt a neutral (non-ideological position) at the point of transit from one Gestus or mask to another. This position of neutrality as non-ideological is especially attacked in postmodernist discourse. And yet, Auslander argues that Boal, unlike Appia, Copeau and Grotowski, is not trying to make the actors eliminate their social masks or purify their performance in order to reach the universal or archetypal or rather, to reach the state of greater authenticity.

The bodily neutrality he [Boal] posits is a rhetorical figure standing for the ability to move from one mask to another while retaining a critical distance from all masks. Unlike the ‘holy’ actor, the spect-actor cannot exist outside ideology and does not even attempt to, but can only try on different ideological positionings as they are inscribed on the body.

Auslander goes on to point out, citing Herbert Blau, that ‘even if the only choice we have is a choice of masks, some masks are better than others’. I would, however, add that the position of neutrality requires an understanding of and empathy with all the other possible positions, and that it is not some sort of pre-symbolic, archetypal position that we have to go back to, but a position that can only be a result of a balance between the positions that are imaginable, possible and practiced. These can never be definite or stable but are always very fragile and problematic. Thus neutrality happens a posteriori, not a priori. The neutral is rather a contradiction of positions much more than a resolution of a tension, or an annihilation of everything that is already there. The neutral is suspicious as a (fully) embodied term. There is something weak about it. And this weakness needs to be included in the perception.

What I would like to do is argue for the value of the neutral, which, I am more than willing to agree, isn’t a neutral term. Therefore I am going to argue for a benevolent neutrality, for a positive or productive neutral rather than for the neutral which needs to be exposed as false or deceitful. It is a certain combination of a modernist and postmodernist view of the neutral. The basic position of neutrality is the attempt to deal with the Other, to be able to perceive the Other.

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
describes a specific process of tuning in on the processes of life. In a way it is a project destined to fail, but also a project without which it would be impossible to let the Other be. Benevolent neutrality is a political and ethical, as much as an artistic project. To a certain extent, the works I will be writing about have been instrumentalized in a quest for the idea of benevolent neutrality. There is absolutely nothing revolutionary or aggressive about the idea of the neutral. It is entirely a process of fine tuning, based on what we already know and is there: of being able to let the Other be who s/he wants to be. It is a position that cannot stand on its own, and is always a complementary position. But it is a position without which all other positions suffer from their self-obsession.

The neutral fails if it is understood as a definite position. However, if it is understood as a precarious balance between two opposing forces, a balance that is a question of practice rather than an idea, then it has the potential to work. It must not be a definite state towards which something is being directed, but a possibility of balance.

What I don’t want to disregard, however, is the neutral’s participation in liberalism and capitalism and the uncomfortable side of that. One could argue that both liberalism as a philosophical and political tradition, and capitalism as a system are rooted in the idea of the neutral. One way to define neutrality is procedural. This means that it refers to a procedure that can be justified without appealing to moral values, or, through appealing to neutral values, such as impartiality and consistency in application of general principles for all related situations. Political liberalism attempts to be neutral in its aim, even though it tries to emphasize certain moral virtues. The liberal state refuses to take a substantive view on what constitutes a good life (a life of virtue, a proper life), and refuses to align with any conception of the good, but decides rather to argue for the neutrality of procedures based on how people interact according to their rights and liberties. Liberal theory looks for that kind of state framework that can accommodate a variety of other, non-liberal moral, political and religious viewpoints. In his critique of liberal ‘neutrality’ Carl Schmitt finds the lack of substance of liberal ‘neutrality’ particularly worrying. He claims that liberals pretend to take a neutral stand via ideological, political and religious positions,
but that at the same time they reveal a lack of ethical and political substance. Schmitt also talks about the hypocrisy of the liberal bourgeois who refuses to take a stand and get involved in a conflict.

Schmitt considers liberal neutrality to be the final result of a history of increasing ‘neutralization’ in the course of which the original mythological and theological substance of political conflict has been lost. In the wake of the early modern religious wars, theological questions were gradually replaced by metaphysical questions which themselves later gave way to humanitarian concerns. In the age of liberalism, even humanitarian morality has become a merely private matter. What remains are economic issues that, according to Schmitt, make up the core of modern liberalism.  

I am taking that into account, however, the value of the neutral, in the way that I argue for it, outweighs the possible dangers of the notion.

0.8 Judson Dance Theatre and the neutral
Moving from a general cultural investigation of the neutral to the field of dance, an appropriate place to start would be Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960s. Although their influence on ‘conceptual dance’ has already been acknowledged, I also argue that numerous elements in their work anticipated the elaborate paradigm of the ‘neutral’ in the works of the choreographers I will explore in my case studies. Judson Dance Theatre was a platform for the presentation of the work of young choreographers between 1962 and 1964. The performances were organised in the Judson Memorial Church in downtown Manhattan, Greenwich Village, where the church’s leaders opened the venue to artists. The platform gathered artists who took Robert Dunn’s composition classes, and it included trained dancers, visual artists, poets, musicians and filmmakers. The artists involved were David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Sally Gross, Deborah Hay, Elaine Summers, Aileen Passloff, Meredith Monk, James Waring, Jessica Cargill, Jen Scoble, Carolee Schneemann, Malcolm Goldstein, Philip Corner and Judith Dunn.

Yvonne Rainer, a choreographer turned filmmaker and one of the most important dance theatre artists to have emerged out of the Judson Dance Theatre, succinctly criticized what she found most problematic with the dance scene as she experienced it when she started making her own work in 1961:

If my rage at the impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing can be considered puritan moralizing, it is also true that I love the body – its actual weight, mass and unenhanced physicality.\(^{55}\)

One of the main foci of the 1960s choreographers sought to disturb the narcissism and sexual exhibitionism of dance practice that they were encountering in dance theatre as art. This was achieved through re-discovering the materiality of the body, including the effects of gravity on the human form, and a shift of attention from expression to *kinesis* – the movement of the body as body and not primarily as vehicle of expression.\(^{56}\) As a result, the audience was presented with something that they were not used to looking at: a deadpan quality of stage presence and a dry style of performing. Technical acting skills - such as a Stanislavskian method, or an expressionistic acting style – were renounced, allowing an impersonal, detached quality of stage presence to come to the fore. And yet Yvonne Rainer started her career after she ‘kind of accidentally fell into acting school’, first through the Theater Arts Colony, and then in the Herbert Berghof School and realized she liked ‘being in front of an audience’.\(^{57}\) Comments made about how she felt about being on stage also appear to contradict with the desire to challenge the idea (and the practice) of the seduction of the audience or the rejection of expressive individualism:

It was as good as orgasm. I knew that was where I lived, that was where I belonged, doing that work and presenting myself physically to an audience. And that, of course, was part of the charisma. That is the urgency, and that pleasure in exhibiting oneself is part of the seduction of

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an audience. The performer has to experience that in order for the audience to get a sense of this presence or to be taken in by it.\textsuperscript{58}

The most challenging feature of the neutral is the tension and strife that this idea provokes in the mind and in the body. This is evident in Rainer’s contradictory statements mentioned at the opening of this section; on the one hand, she despised the manipulative sexuality, narcissism and sneaky seduction of the audience; on the other, she both understood and embraced the seduction that is just too seductive to ever be properly transgressed, that is just too \textit{good} to be renounced. The performer is seduced by the audience’s attention and she enjoys it; that is \textit{why} she is on stage. I argue that the neutral appears precisely in that contradiction, and not simply in the ability of Rainer to realize the ideal of an impersonal stage presence. The appeal of the neutral lies in the impossibility of its full acquisition, the impossibility of a human being ever being capable of capturing the deadpan state that is the neutral. Due to the fact that this state of utter impersonality cannot be fully realized, what is realized is the tension, the struggle, the effort placed in the attempt to emanate dryness. According to Sally Banes, Steve Paxton (another of the Judson Dance Theatre artists) often criticized Rainer for her inability to restrain her stage presence.\textsuperscript{59} However, Paxton himself experienced a similar problem while working with Cunningham who wanted to strip movement of all excess. Paxton described how hard it was for the dancers to perform in such a way as to not reveal any expression:

We danced along trying not to add anything to the movement that we didn’t know what to do with because we didn’t know what context we were performing in. When you’re out there in front of an audience you want to do your best and you want to do the movement as well as you can, and it is hard not to want to somehow use that performer’s tradition of what the human soul is doing in the body – the recognition of human glances, the expressions, the actual muscles of the face that are actually working while you’re dancing.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{58} Yvonne Rainer, \textit{A Woman Who... Essays, Interviews, Scripts} (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 63.


\textsuperscript{60} Interview (video recording); dir. by Douglas Rosenberg (Oregon: ADF, 1996).
And yet, again, one of Paxton’s and Rainer’s important pieces *Word Words* (1963) was inspired by a comment by someone when they auditioned for a concert\(^61\) at the 92nd Street YM/YMHA – ‘those Judson people all look alike to me’.\(^62\) That anecdote indicates that even before they engaged with their first piece exploring impersonal, removed modes of performance, they already managed to emanate an absence of individualistic expression. That must have been the result of the fact that, *in comparison* with the dominant dance practices of the time, Judson people did *appear* neutral, because the neutral is anyway always a relational, rather than an ideal state.

Similar dialectics appears in the case studies that I will examine in this thesis. In his attempt to erase the position of the author, to question it, to ridicule it, Jérôme Bel is re-establishing his own narcissism, strengthening the focus on himself: the force and the importance of the artist’s signature. Raimund Hoghe, with his minimal, restrained actions on the usually empty stage with only a few props and with an expressionless face, inspires exactly the opposite: an intensity of emotion, or sentimentality. BADco. and Thomas Lehmen, with their structural organisation of movement, procedural games and supposed indifference to the individuality of the performers, produce their most captivating moments when the ‘physicality’ of the performers gives: when their breath condenses under the thick plastic, when it seems they remind us that they are flesh and bones, only several breathless minutes away from dying. I am suggesting that these contradictions in the work should be perceived not as the failure of these choreographers, but as a strategy for the production of intensity – because intensity is located in the confusing of the opposites. It is there where one should look for the quality in the work of the choreographers and performers involved with the neutral - in the difficulty, in the problem, in the effort made obvious. As Steve Paxton notes:

> Once you remove the human elements, once you remove the human messages to other humans from a dance work you don’t know how to invest it with emotion and there is a great quandary how to perform it.\(^63\)

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\(^{61}\) Dance performances were called dance concerts at that time.


\(^{63}\) Interview (video recording); dir. by Douglas Rosenberg (Oregon: ADF, 1996).
The neutral allows for the possibilities inherent in quandary.

0.8.1 Controversy

There is an almost anecdotal moment of recognition between Judson Dance Theatre and Jérôme Bel. As I will elaborate on further in the first chapter, the performance *Jérôme Bel* disturbed Raymond Whitehead so much that he has been unable to attend the theatre ever since seeing it in 2002 in Dublin (see p. 79). Yvonne Rainer recounts what happened in January or February 1965 when she presented her *Trio A* at a joint concert with Steve Paxton and David Gordon

> The way out of Judson, if you were in the audience, was to walk across the performance space, and that is what happened at that concert. People trudged unhappily, disgruntled, disconsolately across the space to get out. You had to be pretty disgusted – pretty unhappy to make a spectacle of yourself in that way.⁶⁴

Raymond Whitehead filed a lawsuit because he saw a man ‘drooling’ on his penis. According to Rainer, the audience of the Judson Church Dance concert left the venue because ‘[t]he work was pretty dry. Some of Steve’s work was pretty damn dry, austere, uningratiating’.⁶⁵ The real problem for the audience wasn’t shock or boredom, but the fact that what they were seeing wasn’t dance. Of course, the question of what constitutes dance has often been probed, not just by audiences, but also by performers:

> In response to a movement assignment he had set, Forti had brought in a poem which Dunn insisted could not be considered dance, but Forti couldn’t see why not. Why shouldn’t a dance be a poem? Why not have a dance that consists of herding the audience around a loft? Why can’t dance involve two performers sitting in wheeled boxes whistling to one another while members of the audience pull on ropes that pull them around the space (Rollers)? Why shouldn’t one even just put together one thing after another without establishing a thematic connection to justify this?⁶⁶

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⁶⁵ Ibid.

Shocking or boring, it was trying to redefine what dance could be. And yet, Rainer’s description of the first Concert of Dance in the summer of 1962 also describes another type of reaction. To Lyn Blumenthal’s question: ‘How was the work received?’, she responded:

Tumultuously – considering there was no air conditioning, it was a 90-degree day, and it was a three-hour concert. That audience hung in there with bated breath. I have attended very few events that can parallel those high spirits – their enthusiasm and our enthusiasm.⁶⁷

As I have described, when Jérôme Bel came to Croatia with his *The Show Must Go On* the audience was left with an ecstatic feeling. The combination of shock, disgust, boredom and enthusiasm in the audience’s reaction - a complex clash of contradictions - seems contrary to the idea of the neutral. However, the attempt to neutralize or purify the dance, to release it from excess, from the abundance of the virtuoso, the seductive, the extravagant, and the narcissistic fits well with Barthes’ neutral as that which ‘can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. “To outplay the paradigm” is an ardent, burning activity’.⁶⁸

### 0.8.2 Proceduralism and scores

Here is how Sally Banes describes one of the dances within the Judson Dance Theatre presentation in the summer of 1963.

The dance listed as item number four on the program was Elaine Summer’s *Instant Chance*. Summers used huge numbered Styrofoam blocks, which had been carved into different shapes and painted different colors on different surfaces, to cue movement for dancers. The dancers would throw the blocks up in the air. Each dancer had a separate movement choice in response to the three different factors that fell top up. The shape dictated the place or type of movement; the color, the rate of speed; the number, the rhythm. For instance, Ruth Emerson’s score indicates that for the cube, her movement should be in the air; for the cube, in relevé, for the column, standing; for the sphere, sitting or kneeling; for the oblong, on the floor. If she saw yellow, she should move

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very fast; blue, fast; purple, medium; red, slow, pink, very slow. The instructions for the numbers read:
‘Repeat movement, every movement 5 times but the number equals a rhythm. 1=1 (an insistent pulse), 2=2/4, 3=3/4, 5=5/4’. Each performer was also assigned a color and an identifying mechanism; Ruth Emerson, called Pink, wore a pink leotard.
A later score with different sets of instructions indicates that the same components for shapes were reshuffled and redistributed for each performance (i.e., in the later score, Pink’s instructions for shapes are: tensing and walking; rippling; stretching and collapsing; swinging; and breathing in and out. But Pink’s former instructions are also present in directions to other dancers, e.g. Yellow has the direction relevé for the column; Blue has high in the air for the triangle, and so on.) Also, in the later score the numbers and colors govern different aspects of the dance.69

The parts of this description that talk about the set of instructions for shapes - ‘tensing and walking; rippling; stretching and collapsing; swinging; and breathing in and out’ – announce the organisation movement that Thomas Lehmen uses in his Schreibstück (2002). This same system is re-adjusted and re-developed for BADco.’s Deleted Messages. The method is similar: to predefine the basic elements – the basic types of movement that are used as units, and then to organize the movement through a set of instructions. A mechanical base is constructed for the order in which one movement follows the other. It functions almost as a children’s game except there is no winner in the end. You set the machine going and then it operates according to its pre-set rules, there are no more interventions in the logic of the material. I perceive this to be a feature of the ‘neutral dramaturgy’, that I will further explore in Chapter Four on BADco.

However, for the moment, it is important to note that the production of scores and sets of instruction, which I argue, was an attempt to neutralize the author and the particular emphasis on his responsibility and choice, which is the cornerstone of the traditional perception of art. In order to disturb the established ways of making an art work, one needed to interfere precisely there – to replace the mystique of artistic creation with the procedures and protocols of making work. The procedures themselves become interesting as such in the context of art because they seem out of place there: they seem to interfere with the inspiration that is

supposed to guide the art work. They are defamiliarized and it is this defamiliarization or ostranenie (остранение),\(^7_0\) which Russian Formalists defined as one of the key artistic techniques that allowed for an audience to feel disoriented. The placing of an old form (scores, instructions, procedures) which belongs to a different order of things (administration, bureaucracy), into the artistic context, makes the old forms appear new, and gives them artistic value. The rules are set up, but the final result – the performance – will look different each time because what is given or defined - the procedure – does not define the final point of the choreography – the movements themselves - but only the initial set up and the method for the development of the work. In that way, the choreographer renounces a certain level of authorial control over the piece, but also produces the effect of defamiliarization. S/he attempts to delegate the act of creation somewhere else, in an undefined place of chance – and this is what feels strange. Chance has no preferences. It is indifferent to the choices that we make; it is neutral to the idea of a choice.

The idea that usually gets mentioned in this context is that of the use of scores and chance procedures as a way of uniting art and life, or of bringing life into art.\(^7_1\) What I believe is happening with the use of chance procedures is an attempt to use ‘art’ and ‘life’ against each other, or rather, as a way to alter the perception of both. If one brings something typically associated with ‘life’ - such as ‘chance’ or ‘mechanical order’ - into art, it is a process of a double bind: life is consecrating art and art is consecrating life. There will always be an invisible dividing line between the two, and without that dividing line, it wouldn’t make any sense, for instance, to bring a urinal into the gallery.\(^7_2\) This gesture worked precisely because art is not life, and neither is life art. (The difference between the two is conceptual and perceptual, rather than material or tactile.) These binary divisions, however, are necessary for the operation of the neutral. This is why it would make

\(^7_0\) Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’ or ‘Art as Device’ in *Russian Formalist Criticism*, ed. by L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis (Lincoln: NE, 1965), pp. 5-24.

\(^7_1\) Ramsay Burt, *Judson Dance Theatre: Performative Traces* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 31. Burt attributes this idea to Peter Bürger who developed it in his 1984 book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, however the variation on the claim that ‘processes of art are the processes of life’ was articulated probably as early as 1950s, by John Cage.

\(^7_2\) Marcel Duchamp’s notorious work *The Fountain* (1917), submitted to the Society of Independent Artists Exhibition, New York City.
no sense to analyse the visual qualities of the urinal, its texture or colour. The act of placing it into the museum as an artwork, is what inspires our perception. I argue that the use of chance procedures in Judson Dance Theatre did not work towards the abolishment of the difference between art and life, but towards introducing a new form into an old one – as a process of making art. The tension that we experience in confronting these two notions is the location of the neutral. In fact, the political situation in post World War II USA was in a very specific sense comparable to the situation in Croatia after the war in the 1990s. I am aware that this claim is very bold, and I would like to clarify the reasoning behind it.

According to Daniel Belgrad’s *The Culture of Spontaneity*, the post-war ‘rejection of realism by the avant-garde was as much a rejection of the American political center as a flight from the Stalinist Left’. 73 Although we are talking about radically different historical conditions, and their difference cannot be emphasized enough, the reception of the ‘conceptual dance’ in Croatia had to do with a similar impulse to that which led the American post-war avant-garde. Belgrad claims that ‘[t]he avant-garde therefore wanted to define a social role for art distinct from the “Artists for Victory” exhibitions and the editorial policies of most American art magazines, which hastened to put art at the service of the Allied war effort.’ 74

The interest in chance procedures and structures was also the consequence of the intellectual climate - the idea of the personal control over one’s life and one’s goods was one of the defining points of the American Dream and especially embedded into the discourse of the 1950s America. Lists of instructions in the context of the art, and the use of chance procedures for making art work, socially and politically, was, I believe, also an attempt to break through the obsession with the personal control, with the individual decision making process. After World War II, which emphasized the negative aspects of the senseless and the illogical, 75 and after the productive boom of the 1950s, where everything again moved towards a prioritization of the individual - revolving around personal fulfilment

74 Ibid., p. 20.
75 The horrifying fact that some got back from the war and some didn’t and there was no way of knowing who would come back and who wouldn’t - death as the strongest guarantor of accidentality.
and the question of a choice rather than destiny\(^\text{76}\) - the choreographers of the Judson Dance Theatre embraced accidentality. This was, however, a new type of accidentality, a safe accidentality because it was happening in the controlled conditions of the dance studio. The Judson Dance Theatre artists tried to inaugurate a different type of attitude towards both life and art - an attitude of openness to things as they are, an acceptance of the mechanics of things just happening rather than anyone being in charge. The term ‘happening’ was not, in all that context, merely accidental.\(^\text{77}\) They were interested in a surrender to the chain of events and the renunciation of the impulse to control life and art in all its facets. This receptivity and openness, this willingness to go along with what happens and to explore the creativity of that, this renunciation of complete authorial responsibility, was, I would argue, the location of the ‘neutral’ for Judson Dance Theatre.

The other thing that chance procedures bring into play is a different approach to the structuring of material, finding ways that would not rely so much on the traditional format of the exchange between the theme and variation in dance. This is why the Judson Dance artists were constantly haunted by the question of the logic of the material. Here, however, is how they differed from the choreographers I will explore in the coming chapters. Judson Church Theatre was still very much fascinated with the freedom of \textit{not making sense}: to just ‘put stuff together’ seemed enough. In this sense, the structure of the choreographies of Bel, Lehmen, Hoghe or BADco. is much tighter. And even if it’s possible to argue that the structure is not, the discursive tools we use to approach them, and the attempt \textit{not to make sense} doesn’t seem to hold the same quality of transformational power as it had then. The 1960s were still very much impressed with the idea of \textit{not doing the theme}: this fascination is obvious from the following observation made by Rainer in her admiration for Simone Forti’s \textit{See-Saw} (1960):

\(^{76}\) The idea of ‘destiny’ is often activated in a war situation. In such dramatic circumstances, it is appealing to invoke ‘destiny’ in order to provide comfort for that which is intrinsically or ontologically incomprehensible.

What impressed me structurally about it was that she made no effort to connect the events thematically in any way. I mean the see-saw and the two people, that was the connecting tissue. And one thing followed another. Whenever I am in doubt I think of that. One thing following another.  

0.8.3 Minimalism and the neutral

Sally Banes claims that the choreographers of the 1960s and the early 1970s were following Susan Sontag’s *Against Interpretation* when they opposed the constructions of meanings in dance and emphasised instead the immediacy of experience.  

‘We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more.’  

And yet, it seems to me that they also wanted to see less and hear less so that they could feel *more*. They wanted to get rid of the imposed emotionality and suffocating stuffiness of highly elaborated choreographies with psychological and symbolic metaphors, archetypal characters and a fascination with dramatic expressionism. The choreographers of Judson Dance Theatre wanted to ‘clean’ dance of all the excess and all the ballast to see what could be done with it, once it was emptied out and stripped down, *including* the fascination with form.

The key ideological cornerstone of minimalism formulates itself in the renunciation of the spectacular, egotism and sentiment. However, it is worth noting that minimalism as a form, with its insistence on total reduction, opens up the work towards the audience in a different way than the mechanisms of seduction of the audience with the virtuosic in dance. While the virtuosic and spectacular in dance moves towards the viewer, trying to entrap it in its mechanism, the minimalist approach in dance requires the work to move away from the viewer, inviting him or her to step towards it in order to be involved. The minimal is taking on the position of the neutral, because it operates less actively in the production of that effect. It is taking on a more subdued role, relying on the audience to give it productivity. For instance, what Michael Fried famously called

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‘theatricality’\textsuperscript{81} in the visual arts is precisely that effect of engaging the audience, of getting the audience involved. According to him, minimalist work was including the viewer, requiring the viewer’s participation in order to achieve ‘completion’. In that sense, the minimalism of the Judson Dance Theatre sits uncomfortably, renouncing ‘theatricality’, and setting it up again, under different circumstances. It places dance theatre, but also the field of theatre and the field of dance in an awkward position of blurring its mannerisms. Rainer’s famous ‘NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe’\textsuperscript{82} was precisely an attempt to deny the viewer what s/he was used to: disturbing him or her from the usual dance theatre practice of being ‘fed with stuff’. Minimalist performance gives the audience member hardly anything that s/he is accustomed to. The audience is told that they will have to work in order to ‘make sense of’ the work and that this will not be done for them. And yet, the work that needs to be done necessitates openness, willingness and receptivity. On the other hand, minimalist works made the spectator aware of his or her own presence and his or her body, because they were not forcefully smothering him with the material, but instead turning the attention back onto the spectator. Minimalism in dance also focused on the materiality of the body, on its texture and basic existence: breathing, walking, standing up.

\textbf{0.8.4 Gender and the neutral}

Ramsay Burt argues that ‘Despite a minimalist reduction of representational elements, the new dance did not render the body neutral. The way in which Rainer’s work acknowledged the body’s materiality, I suggest, did precisely the opposite’.\textsuperscript{83} From the description that follows it becomes obvious that Burt is positing that the body in Rainer’s work was not treated as if it had no gender, as if it was asexual or aseptic: an acknowledgment of its biological gender was effectively in place. And yet, a couple of lines further, he also states that Rainer was ‘reclaiming the body from traditional dualistic ways of thinking’,\textsuperscript{84} which is precisely how I, via Roland Barthes, understand the idea of the neutral: as the


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{82}Yvonne Rainer, ‘No to spectacle…’, Tulane Drama Review, 10.2 (1965), 178.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{83}Ramsay Burt, Judson Dance Theatre: Performative Traces (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 16.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{84}Ibid.}
baffling of opposites. Even in the Rainer quotation that I use to open this chapter, it is clear that she was almost apologizing for the problem she had with sexual exhibitionism - as if there is a necessary link between the desire to renounce the sexual exhibitionism and being puritan. The idea of the neutral doesn’t mean the abolishing of sexuality, in the same way in which, although the noun ‘child’ is grammatically neutral, a child’s gender is never neutral. The idea of the neutral does not insist on the renouncement of the sexual or biological gender. What it does mean instead is a certain feeling of not being tied to the traditional roles or the customary performances of sexuality. It means a certain openness to that which needs yet to come, towards a certain potentiality, something which is about to happen. The image of a child is interesting in this respect, because it is also two-fold: it is sexual as it is, but also anticipates sexuality, unrealized but nevertheless with a strong potential for its development. Because of the social stigma around the sexuality of a child, children are perceived as asexual, and yet, children are also sexual beings. In sexual terms, minimalism in art demonstrated much less ‘machismo’ in the sense of the ‘machismo of Jackson Pollock’s abstract expressionism. The sexuality of minimal dance theatre is not aggressive, provocative or too strong. It is the sexuality of ‘a spontaneous emotional reaction’, of that which comes naturally, organically: sexuality as a consequence of bodies touching, rather than a deliberately provoked or demonstrative sexuality.

There is an interesting point that links minimalism and gender roles, though. Anna C. Chave in her research into minimalism in dance and visual arts argues that the impersonality of minimal art was labelled masculine, and for that reason, female

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85 ‘If my rage at the impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing can be considered puritan moralizing, it is also true that I love the body – its actual weight, mass and unenhanced physicality.’ Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961-1973* (Halifax, NS: The Press of Novia Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 69.


87 Junichi Toyota and Flavia Vlava Florea explain the attribution of the neutral grammatical gender as a consequence of the reproduction possibilities, rather than of sexuality: ‘The gender system in Proto-Indo-European was binary between active (animate referents) and inactive (inanimate referents) and the choice of gender was partially related to the ability to reproduce. The use of neuter for small children or girls can be seen as a residue of the world view commonly employed by Proto-Indo-European speakers.’ In ‘Grammatical Gender: A Case of Neuter in Old English and Languages of Europe’, *Linguistics and Literature*, 7.2 (2009), 163-172.

choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti were marginalized within the minimalist canon.\textsuperscript{89} In another words, what they were doing could not be perceived as impersonal or detached, \textit{because} they were women. The problem with this type of perception is that it accepts the fact that the idea of the impersonal is connected with the male. That is why it is important to understand that the neutral gives the impersonal its dialectical potential. The neutral is that which refuses to be defined permanently. If the dominant cultural tendency is to connect the male with the impersonal, and the female with the personal, than the neutral disturbs that opposition. If we accept that the impersonal is not traditionally related to the feminine and that it can be a potential for surprising effects, the neutral is allowed to operate in that tension between genders. In addition, there is the strength in the impersonal, if embodied by a female dancer and a choreographer because that offers, as Banes states, ‘alternatives to what they perceived as the overemotional female roles in dance’.\textsuperscript{90} As Burt argues, the impersonality of art was an integral part of the theoretical position of minimalism, rather than the result of the sexism of the 1960s.

\textbf{0.8.5. Functionality}

You start with an idea, like that you’re going to build a ramp and put ropes on it and then you’re going to climb up and down. So you don’t start by climbing up and down, and then developing movement. You don’t start by experiencing the movement and evolving the movement, but you start from the idea that already has the movement pretty prescribed.\textsuperscript{91}

There are two reasons why Simone Forti’s statement is important. On the one hand, it shows the general conceptual orientation of Forti’s work, which links it directly with conceptual dance of the 1990s and 2000s. What is important is that the dance doesn’t come from the body. Instead its initial point is an idea which then informs the physical behaviour of the body. So movement is the consequence of an idea; it is a conceptually driven movement. If we think about how this type of movement works, it basically takes attention away from the way the movement

\textsuperscript{89} Anna C. Chave, ‘Minimalism and biography’, \textit{Art Bulletin}, 83 (March 2000), 149-63.
\textsuperscript{91} Simone Forti, \textit{Art Archives: Simone Forti} (Exeter: The Arts Documentation Unit, University of Exeter, 1993), p. 11.
appears to those who observe it, and focuses on what the movement does or how it fulfils a function – on its status as a process. It completely shifts the concept of what to observe in a dance performance, because what you are looking for is whether the task has been fulfilled, rather than movement for movement’s sake. That idea seems completely contrary to a conventional understanding of what dance is – dance is movement unburdened of a goal; it is directed towards itself, towards its own versatility. So it is relatively rare to come across choreographers who are interested in functional movement. A similar idea is proposed in the works of both Thomas Lehmen and Jérôme Bel. In Lehmen’s performances the gestures that performers make are defined by the word or the phrase that they need to perform. The dance starts from the idea, rather than from the way the body moves, or from the aesthetic qualities of the movement. In fact, the dance isn’t particularly interested in the aesthetics of movement if by aesthetics we consider the fluidity of moving around a space, the illusion of effortlessness, grace, beauty, and all of those qualities that were traditionally connected with the aesthetics in dance.

0.8.6 Interdisciplinarity and intellectualism
The choreographers of Judson Dance Theatre worked closely with other artists. They opened the field of dance to collaborations with musicians (John Cage, Phillip Glass), visual artists (Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt) and writers such as Jackson Mac Low, Joel Oppenheimer and Denise Levertov. Dance concerts, as they were called, were happening outside of theatres: in galleries, museums, in churches and even on a farm. Dance was moving out of its genre niche, and was practiced by various artists regardless of their art – by all those who wanted to play with the body and what it can do – dance was gaining a position outside of its narrow field of followers. This collided with a burgeoning interest in the body in the visual arts. The visual arts were also moving away from the creation of objects, and beginning to use the body as transformable physical and sculptural material, and not simply as a vehicle for expression. Working

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92 Steve Paxton’s *Afternoon* (1963) was performed on a farm.
with Ann Halprin, Simone Forti noticed that ‘when you are painting, you move a lot, it’s a lot about rhythm, putting down paint, it [is] about depth and movement’.94 The Judson Dance Theatre and the choreographers connected with the Judson Dance, especially Simone Forti, were inspired by the movements of the artists, the movements that were the side-effect of visual arts engagement in producing art work. Forti called her work dance constructions because ‘[t]he audience could walk around it… I saw them existing in space the way sculpture exists in an art gallery space. The audience walked around the pieces. They took place in different spaces in the room’.95 This compares well with BADco.’s production Deleted Messages in the way that the company organized the space as a gallery rather than as a conventional performance space. People are not seated but are free to walk around, to see the performers from all sides, to choose in which order they will approach the performers, and which one of them they will watch. The audience is able to influence the performers’ movements, but also to come really close to the performers. Activating the audience’s body, I would argue, makes them feel more connected to what is happening on stage. What Burt said about Forti’s Five dance constructions and some other things (1961) could have been easily applied to Deleted Messages:

Seeing them close up in this way rather than across the conventional divide between seated audience and performance space would have made spectators more directly aware of the relationship between their perception of their own bodies and those of the dancers.96

And yet, although Judson Dance Theatre was so much involved with the materiality of the body, dancers and choreographers were still accused of overt intellectualism. Rainer remembers her days at the Herbert Berghof Acting School in the following terms:

I think my very first teacher was Lee Grant who was blacklisted during that period from the McCarthy days, so was teaching. And as I recall, she told me I was too intellectual – I didn’t feel enough. That was a refrain I

heard over and over. They could see me thinking up there. I wasn’t really living it.\textsuperscript{97}

The intellectual interests of the Judson Dance Theatre choreographers were also clear from their background – most of them went to university, in fact they were the first generation of dancers that did so. I would argue that this tradition has continued in Jérôme Bel’s generation. Bel took a sabbatical from professional dance to study and read. Raimund Hoghe began his career as a writer and only later moved into creating dance works. BADco. feature a philosopher amongst the company’s dancers, and the director of most of their productions teaches theory at the Academy of Drama Arts in Zagreb. With BADco. there is a strong reliance on the textual material that accompanies the dance: the ‘external’ context is important to the understanding of the piece. Manifestos such as Yvonne Rainer’s famous \textit{No to spectacle}... \textsuperscript{98} are used to textually base and announce the company’s approach and positions. In the 1960s, dance criticism began following the intellectual trends of the dancers; Barbara Rose being one of the first critics to quote philosophy and literary theory in her dance reviews.\textsuperscript{99} This example, as I will indicate in chapters 1 and 4, is present in the work of Bel and BADco.

\textbf{0.9 Conceptual dance and the neutral}

The choreographers I have chosen are a part – or on the edges, as in the case of Raimund Hoghe - of a particular conceptual paradigm or ‘movement’ (for lack of a better word) in European dance since the mid-1990s. Other choreographers that can be identified with this paradigm include: La Ribot, Jonathan Burrows, Boris Charmatz, Xavier Le Roy, Mårten Spångberg, Vera Mantero, Meg Stuart, Juan Dominguez, Benoît Lachambre and Gilles Jobin (among many others). This movement does not have a proper name, though some critics have labelled it conceptual. These choreographers started questioning the conventions of the art form of dance and gravitated ‘toward the moment of pause’,\textsuperscript{100} toward ‘a hiccuping in choreographed movement’, ‘the eruption of kinaesthetic

\textsuperscript{97} Yvonne Rainer, \textit{A Woman Who... Essays, Interviews, Scripts} (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 50-51.
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Tulane Drama Review}, 10.2 (1965), p. 178.
\textsuperscript{99} See for instance Barbara Rose, ‘ABC Art’, \textit{Art in America}, 53.5 (October/November 1965), pp. 57-69.
\textsuperscript{100} Helmut Ploebst, \textit{No Wind no Word} (München: Kieser, 2001), p. 9.
stuttering”\textsuperscript{101} that was in opposition to the idea of dance as a flow of bodily movement. They are engaged with forms of dance and choreography that show ‘the exhaustion of the notion of dance as a pure display of uninterrupted movement’,\textsuperscript{102} or that question ‘the presupposition that ‘the human body is the distinctive medium of the art form called dance, and by implication, of choreography as the art of writing, composing or performing dances’.\textsuperscript{103} They are involved with ‘the question of dance that initiates a critique of representation by insisting on the still, on the slow, and on that particular form of repetition known in rhetoric as “paranomasia”’.\textsuperscript{104} In other words, these choreographers are engaged with questioning what dance could be by attempting to untie the traditional connections between ‘dance’ and ‘the flow of movement’. It is really not very surprising that dance critics often refer to this ‘movement’ as ‘conceptual dance’,\textsuperscript{105} ‘think dance’, ‘anti-dance’ or ‘non-dance’, despite the fact that many of the choreographers involved do not accept these labels, and these artists do not represent a homogeneous aesthetic tendency or even a fixed artistic network.

Ramsay Burt’s criticism of the term ‘conceptual dance’ is directed primarily towards the idea that ‘conceptual dance’ stands for a choreographer-genius who sits in his chair and intellectualizes his way out of the performance by simply telling the dancers what to do, faking some ‘clever’ trick that the spectator needs to decode and solve. Instead, this ‘movement’, according to Burt, is allowing choreographers to develop an interest in theoretical ideas, and to ask questions ‘about ownership of the creative process; about the nature of dance movement; about performative presence; about the performer-spectator relationship, etc’.\textsuperscript{106}

Although the notion of ‘conceptual dance’ has not been promoted in the UK, it is well-known on the Continent. There, however, it is considered a partial misnomer mainly because this form of artistic dance practice is still reliant on its material and physical manifestations. It is not just the presentation of abstract concepts or


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 7.

\textsuperscript{103} Rudi Laermans, “'Dance in General' or Choreographing the Public, Making Assemblages’, \textit{Performance Research}, 13.1 (2008), 4-10 (p. 5).


\textsuperscript{105} See Ramsay Burt, ‘Constructing Contemporary Dance: Amperdans Festival’, \textit{Ballet-Dance Magazine Online} (October 2004), \url{http://www.ballet-dance.com/200411/articles/amperdans20041000.html} [accessed on 15 September 2010].

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
word play, but still has to do primarily with questions of bodies in space. The development of the work underlying the notion of ‘conceptual dance’ has been supported since the 1990s by important European dance and performance institutions and schools such as Tanzquartier Wien in Vienna, Centre Nationale de la Danse in Paris, Tanz Fabrik Potsdam near Berlin, Moussonturm in Frankfurt, the European Dance Development Centre in Arnhem, the School for New Dance Development (SNDO) in Amsterdam, PARTS in Bruxelles, thus bringing into question the institutional critique which formed an important aspect of conceptual art. As Bojana Cvejić summarizes:

A rather evident fact for a choreographer, theoretician, critic or programmer is that the infrastructures supporting contemporary dance in Europe in the 1990s developed so rapidly thanks to assimilating critical discourses into self-reflexive institutional routine. The venues for dance in the 1990s established themselves with the understanding that if they were going to promote choreography then they should emancipate it from the modern dance definitions, produce authors who problematize authorship, and instigate research and collaborative frames of production even if such orientation mainly results in a new aesthetic (the ‘look’) of research and small-scale work. In absorbing poststructuralist and art theory in order to ‘catch’ up with visual art and cinema’s contemporaneity and reflect its proper discipline theoretically, the field of choreography and dance in Europe developed sometimes oblique ways of forming and operating discourses.

Despite understanding artists’ reluctance to use the name ‘conceptual dance’, Lepecki argues that ‘conceptual dance’ at least allows for historically locating this movement within a genealogy of twentieth-century performance and visual arts, by referring to the conceptual art movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s that shared its critique of representation, its insistence on politics, its fusion of the visual with the linguistic, its drive for a dissolution of genres, its critique of authorship, its dispersion of the art-work, its privileging of the event, its critique of institutions, and its aesthetic emphasis on

107 Bojana Cvejić articulated well the problems with the notion in ‘To end with judgment by way of clarification…’, a conversation between Xavier Le Roy, Bojana Cvejić and Gerald Siegmund, in It Takes Place When it Doesn’t: On Dance and Performance since 1989, ed. by Martina Hochmuth, Krassimira Kruschkova, Georg Schöllhammer (Vienna: Revolver, 2006), pp. 48-56
minimalism – all traits that are recurrent in many recent works in Europe of which Jérôme Bel is the initiator.\(^{109}\)

Bojana Cvejić also agrees that there are some reasons why it seems appropriate to use the term ‘conceptual dance’. She argues that there is a similarity in thinking between the conceptual art of the 1960s and conceptual dance which have to do with an institutional critique in the sense of ‘critiquing the ideological fetishism of the status of object and commodity status’\(^ {110}\) and the usage of speech acts: ‘This is a work of art if I say so.’\(^ {111}\) A similar logic is applied to dance – ‘This is dance because I say so’. Conceptual dance practices furthermore share an interest in extreme self-reflexivity, in obsessively asking the question ‘What is art?’, and the acceptance of the idea that ‘if dance tries to tell us something about the world it is bound to fail… it can only represent representation, in other words, its means, mechanisms and ideologies of producing meaning and statues in contemporary culture’.\(^ {112}\)

This rather general understanding of the notion of ‘conceptual dance’ seems important to me for a very obvious and simple reason: because it indicates a specific preoccupation with abstract notions in the field of contemporary dance or dance theatre.\(^ {113}\) The main characteristic that these authors share is a re-thinking of their position as dancers and choreographers. On what grounds they are re-thinking that position, is, I would argue, a different question. For instance, Raimund Hoghe asks the question of his right to be perceived as a dancer regardless of the fact that his body does not fit with the conventional criteria for a dancing body. His approach asks questions ‘about the world’. His practice is still

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\(^{113}\) Contemporary dance and dance theatre are used as synonyms in this thesis, following Emil Hrvatin (‘Uvod’, in *Teorije sodobnega plesa*, ed by. Emil Hrvatin [Ljubljana: Maska, 2001], pp. 7-14 [p. 9]). Contemporary dance is used more in the British context, while dance theatre or Tanztheater springs from the German context.
reflexive, even if it is also representing the world and its ideological positions. These two situations do not exclude each other, not if understood through the idea of the neutral, at least. Connecting the work of a French choreographer Jérôme Bel, German choreographers Thomas Lehmen and Raimund Hoghe and the Croatian dance and performance company BADco. in one study allows me to articulate a certain ‘structure of feeling’ of ‘the neutral’ that is as much political as it is aesthetic and theoretical. Earlier analyses of the works of these artists have not accorded special attention to the notion of the ‘neutral’, although this word is often mentioned in relation to all of them. This is the first study to bring an Eastern European, Croatian company into the same research field on an equal footing with Western European artists, arguing, together with Boris Groys,114 for the formal and aesthetic similarity between Eastern European and Western European art. My aim is to define an ambiguous affect that the works of these choreographers produce, a certain affective disorientation but also an ontological sense of indeterminacy – a proper inability or rather, a refusal to decide between two conflicting notions, which is as much an intellectual position as it is an emotional state. It is a state that refuses to engage in a synthesis, after a thesis and an antithesis,115 but remains suspended in a no-man’s land, constantly circling between these two notions. My goal involves re-framing the works of these choreographers with regard to that ‘suspension of decision’ between opposite positions and the thesis argues that this is precisely what their work is offering to the contemporary viewer. This ‘suspension of decision’, ‘stalled or suspended action’ is both an intellectual and an emotional state, and previous studies of ‘conceptual dance’ usually completely ignore the emotional position and the affect-based effects of the ‘suspension of decision’, which is why Raimund Hoghe is often treated as more of an outsider in the field of ‘conceptual dance’. The neutral is always somehow in-between the resistance to liberal capitalism as a dominant global mode of existence and deeply resonant with it. The fundamental cornerstone of liberal capitalism – money - is the primary neutral mode. We are living in the age that Georg Simmel anticipated over a century ago, in which

114 Boris Groys, Spisi o umetnosti (Ljubljana: ŠOU, 2003).
115 The tripartite structure is often used to explain Hegel’s dialectical thought, although he never uses these exact words himself. Thesis is an intellectual proposition, antithesis is its negation and synthesis is the formation of a new proposition based on the resolving of the contradiction in the thesis and the antithesis. Synthesis transgresses both thesis and antithesis, although it is based on both.
'money becomes more and more a mere symbol, neutral as regards its intrinsic value'.

André Lepecki argues that movement became necessarily aligned with dance only in modernity, due to modernity’s obsession with kinetics and a modernist search for dance’s autonomy that would allow dance to be ‘equal’ to other art forms. Although I am suspicious of Lepecki’s bold claim that dance was not already closely linked with movement before the advent of modernity, it is not the subject of this thesis to explore to what extent this is true. What is important for my thesis though, is that the tendency to renounce movement in contemporary dance is thought of as an act of ‘ontological betrayal’. This ‘ontological betrayal’ turned out to be very productive for ‘reflexive dance’ choreographers, because it gave them a field to question and to produce (new forms of) work with and through that questioning. It also the fact that dance is primarily a social phenomenon, rather than something that has its ontological existence, prior or unrelated to social conventions. Unlike Lepecki, who included two artists who are not operating in the field of dance, Bruce Nauman and William Pope.L on the grounds that he wanted to ‘address the choreographic outside artificially self-contained disciplinary boundaries’, I have chosen to focus specifically on those artists operating in the field of dance theatre, meaning that they are performing at dance festivals and engaging specifically with the discussions on dance as art. I sympathize with Lepecki when he wants to ‘address the choreographic outside the proper limits of dance’ but I am interested less in the ‘ontology of the choreographic’ than in the social definition of the dance as a field of art and how that social definition is constructed and reconstructed. The field of contemporary dance theatre is my primary interest and I would argue that the strength in questioning dance lies in the fact that the questioning is coming precisely from the field of dance - from dance schools, dance festivals, dance production companies and dance artists. There is something challenging about a disciplinary boundary, precisely because it is arbitrary to a large extent, and my research is focused on accepting that boundary as a means of interrogating it.

118 Ibid.
0.10 A literature survey: the reception of the work of BADco., Thomas Lehmen, Raimund Hoghe and Jérôme Bel

There has been no extended treatment of BADco.’s work to date. The critical reception of BADco. in Croatia has been burdened with the underlying problem of (mis)understanding and hermeticism that I will further explore in Chapter 4. In a review of their production Diderot’s Nephew (2001), one theatre critic, Ivana Slunjski, even posed the question of whether the performers understand what they are performing.\(^\text{119}\) The regular theatre critic of the daily paper Novi list and the cultural bi-weekly Zarez, Nataša Govedić, often finds their work very cryptic and emotionally distant.\(^\text{120}\) It is perhaps not surprising that they face such responses from their critics because they often explicitly state their interest is not in the ‘staging of the theme, but in the exhaustion of the theme, accumulation of notes, where nothing is explained but where the new horizon around the problem is created.’\(^\text{121}\) However, several authors such as Marin Blažević, Ivana Ivković (before she joined the company in 2004), Bojana Cvejić and Marko Kostanić argue that the complexity of their work is precisely why it is challenging to explore it in writing. Bojana Cvejić, following Deleuze, claims that

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\text{[i]f we want to understand what BADco. are doing, we shouldn’t look for thoughts in their content. Instead, we should understand the situations that BADco. are creating in order to make the audience think. Thinking isn’t a natural ability but a creation, and concepts are not proof of common sense, but products of imagination or even fiction.}^{122}
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Blažević argues that BADco.’s prize-winning choreography 2 (Two) is a response to ‘Brezovec’s massive suicidal iconoclasm.’\(^\text{123}\) In Blažević’s view,

\(^{120}\) The examples are numerous, but the article where she most clearly expresses this idea is the following ‘O čemu se u ovoj BADcompany ne govori?’, Zarez (30 November 2006); the article can be accessed here [http://www.zarez.hr/193/kazaliste1.htm](http://www.zarez.hr/193/kazaliste1.htm) [accessed 18 June 2010].
\(^{121}\) From the program booklet for the performance memories are made of this... performance notes (2006).
\(^{122}\) Bojana Cvejić, ‘Give me a problem!’, Fracijka, 49 (2008), 64-69 (p. 67).
\(^{123}\) Marin Blažević, ‘Dying bodies, living corpses: transition, nationalism and resistance in Croatian theatre’ in Contemporary Theatres in Europe: A Critical Companion, ed. by Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 87-106 (p. 99). Branko Brezovec is a Croatian theatre director working often in Macedonia and Italy whose performances are visually and textually saturated to the point of complete audience exhaustion.
Although produced a few months earlier than *The Grand Master of All Scoundrels*, choreographic miniature 2 (Two) [...] can be interpreted as a radical minimalist response both to the aggressive exuberance of the self-celebrating multimedia Croatian Super-icon and the spectacularity of Brezovac's massive suicidal iconoclasm (which ultimately, despite the dis-representational and self-destructing procedures, constitutes itself as an eruption of images). Confronted with the violent, simulated and simultaneous totalising (really or potentially totalitarian) realities, the dancer choreographer decided to- literally – close her eyes.\(^{124}\)

Ivana Ivković analyses BADco.'s choreography in the framework of Michel Serres' theory of communication explored in his book *The Parasite* where noise is privileged over information. According to Ivković, 2 offers a mode of emancipation from language in a sensorial communication.\(^{125}\)

The process of translation, the changing of the bodies' positions and meanings, places the object of translation – the translated body, in a state of insecure identity. The obstruction in communication, noise on the line of pulse transmission, builds intersubjectivity as a quasi-object. The “we” in 2 is actually fluctuation of one disjointed “I”.\(^{126}\)

Bojana Cvejić places a lot of emphasis on the characteristics of BADco.'s choreographed movement that repeatedly attempts to resist fluidity and instead insists on its *brokenness*. With regard to *Fleshdance* (2004) she argues that the dancers come close to the spectators not by an invisible multiplicity in darkness, but by a white blank exposure of bodies disfigured as they are broken in pieces, bent and folded in a disturbed space of a right angle between the wall and the floor and the proximity of the spectators' gaze creates a sensation of excessive flesh, of an image constantly upsetting figurability in fracturing gaze.\(^{127}\)

BADco.’s interests revolve around the issues of space of the performance and the organization of movement in negotiation with the audience, and I will particularly address this in the analysis of *Deleted Messages*. Danijela Kapusta writes that in

\(^{124}\) Ibid.


\(^{126}\) Ibid.

\(^{127}\) Bojana Cvejić, ‘Notes on Cinematic Procedures in Contemporary Choreography’, *Frakcija*, 51/52 (2009), 44-49 (p. 46).
the performance memories are made of this... performance notes (2006) ‘the performers are entering the space of “viewer’s communities”, turning their borders into the factors of encouragement or modes of limiting their own performative act’ in order to ‘create an archaic situation of the story-teller and its listeners, where their own random thoughts are often intercepting the theoretical texts they are citing from’. Another central concern for critics dealing with BADco.’s work is the question of time. The company attempts to create a complex organization of time, most explicitly in the performance The League of Time (2009). Here, according to Marko Kostanić, ‘the fictive subject of the economy of attention observes its precedent from the position that will precede the precedent’. In the same text, Kostanić claims that in BADco.’s choreography

[t]he creative act of viewing, articulated through a choreographic vocabulary and constructed through complex operations in time and through the organization of attention, has as its basis the social and politically determining contemporary operations in time – complex financial derivates and their attention.\(^\text{129}\)

Those who admire BADco. for their complexity, often fail to provide a clear account of their fascination. Apart from my reading of the idea of the neutral in their work, my detailed analysis of their production Deleted Messages will attempt at offering precisely this: a clear articulation of complex issues at play in their work.

Thomas Lehmen’s work is often mentioned briefly in writings about the group of new European choreographers, but it is rarely analysed in depth. Rudi Laermans briefly mentions his production Stationen (2003) – where Lehmen asks selected members of the audience to describe their professions in detail - while attempting to define collective attention using Jacques Rancière’s writings on the ‘literal invisibility within the public sphere of various collective and discursive subjects that are not considered to be part of “the community”’.\(^\text{130}\) In the introduction to

\(^\text{128}\) Danijela Kapusta, ‘BADco.’s memories are made of this...’, broadcast on Croatian Radio 3, Zagreb (4 April 2007).
\(^\text{129}\) Marko Kostanić, ‘BADco’s League of Time, to be published in Frakcija in 2011.
Knowledge in Motion, the collection of essays that Laermans’ chapter is a part of, Lehmen is said to have explored the idea that ‘the study of movement is based on both physical and verbal communication processes’. Lehmen’s work is read in the context of ‘dance as communication between performer and audience, and between choreographer and performer’. Lehmen is often invited to participate in conferences and symposia that deal with dance and cultural education, because of his projects Lehmen lernt (2006) and Lehmen macht (2006) where he deals with ‘the kind of social learning’ that ‘as a form of learning is slowly dying out’. For these projects Lehmen was inspired by his communications with a group of students he was working with in China. He recalls it as follows:

At the start of the workshop, we couldn’t understand or make sense of each other at all. Every word, every utterance spoken by the teacher was misunderstood by the workshop participants, and the reverse. At the time, the translator suggested to me that we work to develop a kind of third language, a language entirely different from our own languages. This third language could be developed by referring to a concrete object or process, and could only function when we all assumed a position or a stance in which we know nothing. In other words, we had to create an equal and mutual dialogue using the work that we were engaged in as the object. Only in this manner were we able to arrive at a point in which we were able to work together.

Lehmen’s use of written instructions to produce choreographic material, according to Franz Anton Cramer, enables him to ask some uncomfortable questions about the supposed ephemerality of dance, the position of the author and the dancers in a choreography that is conceived in a way that does not require the presence of the choreographer to be learned or performed. My interest in Lehmen’s work however, lies in the particular ability of his written material to

133 Thomas Lehmen in dialogue with Pirkko Husemann, ‘Building a Common Language’ in Knowledge in Motion: Perspectives of Artistic and Scientific Research in Dance, ed. by Sabine Gehm, Pirkko Husemann and Katharina von Wilcke (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2007), pp. 267-274 (p. 267).
134 Ibid., p. 269.
inspire a certain state in the dancers, somewhere between the personal and the universal. My research on Lehmen was much more inspired by his own discourse around his work, interviews with him and his lengthy artistic statements, such as ‘I am not a real teacher-teacher’. We had numerous conversations while I was assisting him with the preparation of the performance of Stationen in Zagreb in April 2004, and while we were leading a workshop together in Munich in November 2008 as a part of the Schwere Reiter festival, which influenced my approach to his work to a greater extent than the German published reviews or the limited critical writings published on his work.

Jérôme Bel is without doubt the practitioner covered in this thesis whose work has attracted the most critical attention. I have quoted a number of texts in my chapter on Bel, and I will here briefly mention some others to give and indication of the foci of existing studies of this work. Tim Etchells finds Bel’s work to resonate well with Forced Entertainment’s aesthetics. He has been following Bel’s work since 1997 and has written several articles on his work, such as ‘More and More Clever Watching More and More Stupid (some thoughts around rules, games and The Show Must Go On)’, ‘Shirtologie! Jerome Bell [sic]’, ‘The Show Must Go On’, ‘Nothing flows but everything follows’ and ‘The Crying Game of Theatre’. In his characteristic poetic way, Etchells shows a deep appreciation for Bel, finding him to be a ‘brilliant French choreographer’ and a ‘legend’.

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139 Tim Etchells, ‘Show Must Go On’ (April 2000), published on Bel’s website, see http://www.jeromebel.fr/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=4&t=11 [accessed 27 November 2010].
140 Tim Etchells, ‘Nothing flows but everything follows’ (February 2008), published on Bel’s website, see http://www.jeromebel.fr/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=4&t=33 [accessed 27 November 2010].
142 Ibid.
143 Tim Etchells, ‘Show Must Go On’ (April 2000), published on Bel’s website, see http://www.jeromebel.fr/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=4&t=11 [accessed 27 November 2010].
A number of works mention Bel in the context of the research on Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), no doubt because the choreographer deployed it in an innovative manner in his performance *Jérôme Bel*. These include Gabriele Brandstetter and Gabriele Klein’s ‘Bewegung in Übertragung. Methodische Überlegungen am Beispiel von Le Sacre du Printemps’, Peter M. Boenisch’s ‘Mediation Unfinished: Choreographing Intermediality in Contemporary Dance Performance’ and Stephanie Jordan’s *Stravinsky Dances: Re-Visions across a Century*. Johannes Birringer has written about Bel’s problematization of dance in his analysis of Nottdance (the Nottingham Dance Festival) in 2005, but also in the context of interactive dance and the Internet. There have been several texts following the retrospective of his works in London’s Sadler’s Wells (1-16 February 2008): Joshua Abrams in his article ‘The Contemporary Moment of Dance: Restaging Recent Classics’ and Nicola Conibere in ‘This is not sublime: a retrospective of Jérôme Bel’ work argue for the value of the retrospective in building and maintaining an audience and ‘question the place of dance in contemporary moment’. Claire Bishop in ‘Deskilling Dance’ reflects on Bel’s reception in the UK, and while she sympathizes with Bel’s claim that his piece *The Last Performance* was a meditation on Gilles Deleuze’s seminal text *Difference and Repetition* she thinks that ‘it is hard to imagine many Anglophone artists getting away with such a comparison’ although Bel ‘pulled it off’. Bel’s comparison is also supported by writings about his work in French. Roland

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148 Johannes Birringer, ‘Interactive dance, the body and the Internet’, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 3.3 (December 2004), 165-78.


152 Claire Bishop, ‘Deskilling Dance’ (February 2009), published on Bel’s site, see http://www.jeromebel.fr/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=4&t=38 [accessed 27 November 2010].
Huesca’s ‘Danser nu: usage du corps et rhétorique postmoderne’, published in *the Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, reads his work through Deleuzian territories and Foucault’s normative power of male sexuality. Other significant acknowledgments of Bel’s work in the UK context have been in *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*, edited by Simon Murray and John Keefe and in Ramsay Burt’s *Judson Dance Theater: Performative Traces*. Ramsay Burt writes about the question of interdisciplinarity in contemporary work and mentions Bel’s *Veronique Doisneau* in ‘The Specter of Interdisciplinarity’. In ‘On the Premises of French Contemporary Dance: Concepts, Collectivity and “Trojan Horses” in the Work of Jérôme Bel and Loïc Touzé’, Toni D’Amelio approaches Bel’s work from an interesting perspective, arguing that different languages (English and French) differently shape conceptions of the body. There have also been numerous published interviews with the highly articulate Bel reflecting on his practice, undertaken by Steven De Belder, Jean-Max Collard and myself. A further conversation between Alain Buffard and Xavier Le Roy is not only a reflection on Bel’s work, but also an innovative form in which two artists write to each other about the work of a

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158 The question of different languages and the way their attempts to negotiate contemporary dance practices collide, is very complex and is beyond the scope of this thesis. The discourse around various dance theatre works and the way they have been differently interpreted in various countries and cultures is closely linked with the fact that ‘language is the house of Being’ (Martin Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, in *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell [London: Taylor & Francis, 1978], p. 213. In my thesis, I have struggled a great deal with translations of some writings (especially the ones on BADco. originally written in Croatian). Croatian syntax tends to be rather long, with a lot of subordinate clauses. Subordinate clauses allow for the paradox to appear in one sentence, thus making it more compact.
third practitioner.162 Bel was also the subject of Pirko Husemann’s analysis Ceci est de la danse.163

André Lepecki’s Exhausting Dance contains a chapter dedicated to Bel’s work: ‘Choreography’s “slower ontology”: Jérôme Bel’s critique of representation’164 which has influenced my analyses in a great deal, not in its conclusions, but rather more in its way of thinking, and in the way Lepecki attempts to set up a type of discourse around Bel’s work. Exhausting Dance is the ‘ghost’ book of the chapter on Bel, far less present in direct quotations than its influence has been. In the work of Lepecki,165 Bel’s work is treated as a mode of critiquing the representational understood as an ontohistorical force, as well as the submission of subjectivity to the representational. My focus, on the contrary, lies in the neutral as the structure of feeling that Bel is engaged with and the way that he performs this. The engagement with the neutral enables Bel to critique the representational, because of the paradoxical structure of the neutral. It seems to me that the trope of the neutral has a particular resonance with the impossibility of avoiding representation that Lepecki also agrees with. The second significant text dedicated to Bel is the chapter ‘Die Schreibweisen des Körpers: Jérôme Bel’ in Gerald Siegmund’s Abwesenheit: Eine Performative Asthetik des Tanzes.166 In his study on several contemporary European choreographers, including William Forsythe, Xavier Le Roy and Meg Stuart amongst others, Siegmund argues against what he sees is the dominant stream in Performance Studies that treats ‘presence’ as the main ‘critical and resistant potential’167 of performance. The critical potential of ‘presence’ in the performing arts, according to these theories, is found in its opposition to the iron grip of the representation of reality. Mass media and consumerist capitalism commodify and subject the everydayness and social relations in late capitalism of the Western societies to the advertising and

163 Pirko Husemann, Ceci est de la danse (Nordestedt: Books on Demand, 2002).
165 Ibid.
167 Ibid., p. 451 (all translations from Siegmund’s book are by Tomislav Medak).
marketing machines. The break-through from the chains of social and cultural commodification, from the circulation of marketable chains of signification, from the dynamic social order in which the cultural competence that the masses acquired in the past decades in being subjected to cultural industries, higher education and marketing (thus the emancipation through culture) is located in the space of the real and the materiality that shines through the repetition of signification mechanisms. Physicality (the body) is understood as the key place of this break-through. Presence, unmediated action and ephemerality, which are all attributes that Josette Féral attributes to the field of performativity gain a special position in relation to the elements of repetition and the recognizability of the symbolic order which is attributed to theatricality.

Siegmond, however, argues that at the beginning of the 21st century, it is precisely the performative presence, the uniqueness (refusal to repeat) and the hyperreality of physicality that have become the main locations of a commodified reality that offers the consumer a unique individual experience. Media space is saturated by the liveness of various performativities. Co-opted ‘presence’ placed against representation turns out to be lacking in the potential to encompass the area of the critical in the performative. Siegmond argues that in the society of spectacle, ‘the “maniacally charged presence” [Lepecki] of dance or theatre performance can no longer, on its own, suffice to define performance as a critical practice.168

Therefore, in his analysis, Siegmond goes a step back to the issue of theatricality and looks for the critical potential of resistance to commodification in absence rather than in presence. He is interested in those productions that

[w]ithin their limits and their presence stage absences, with an anthropological absence - the death - as their horizon. They conjure ‘death' scenes, images or even bodies that no longer reflect the subject of the recipient, but rather open it towards an uncommandable and heterogenous experience.169

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168 Ibid.
Siegmund’s analysis of Bel’s work thus concentrates on the issue of absence that, he argues, Bel’s work focuses on. In the same way in which Bel programatically and methodically performs the reduction of the classical theatre to the individual aspects of theatrical signification and convention, the absence is here a side-effect of the method of subtraction. Looking for a theoretical apparatus to expose Bel’s method and to support his analysis, Siegmund focuses on Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero* and the triangle of language, style and mode of writing. Siegmund claims that Bel removes the style (as expression) from his performances, and puts emphasis on the mode of writing, the zero degree of writing, the neutral writing - *écriture blanche*.

My forthcoming analysis of Bel in chapter one follows Siegmund’s understanding of how the reduction to the degree zero, to pure equivalence, removes the aesthetic focus from the work, and opens it up towards the reflection of underlying social and historical relations which are not *thematized* in the productions. The absence of an elaborate dance language and style allows for the social function of the theatre situation to take centre stage. I agree with Siegmund that Bel operates primarily with signs and images, although the body cannot be reduced to either of those. Siegmund is also right when he claims that:

> In a society where flexibility and mobility of capital and people have become imperative, dance with its means of communication being infinitely flexible movement is suspect of being a mere reflection of mechanisms of a globalized economy. Against this background Jérôme Bel's mode of writing marks the very moment of saturation and turn that is needed to give back to the dance theatre the room for reflexion that it lost through the abandonment of its principles to the market.¹⁷⁰

However, although we are both inspired by Barthes, rather than focusing on the absence as the constitutive mechanism of Bel’s work and on its binary opposition with the ‘presence’, I am focusing on the concept of the neutral. The way that the neutral is constructed allows for a systematic refusal of either binary and for the emphasis on their simultaneous co-existence and co-dependence. Siegmund is, in the act of resistance to exploitative mechanisms of capitalism that dance is a part

of, inclined to give the emphasis to ‘the moment of death that has been abandoned by all life, all past and all future, all history and all hope’, ‘where the dancer becomes a prominent emblem of absence’.  

Most of the articles that deal with Raimund Hoghe’s work I refer to in chapter three. It is, perhaps, worth noting his recent interview with Bonnie Marranca, although for those who are familiar with Hoghe’s work, the interview does not reveal much more than what has already been said about him or what he has previously revealed about his work. Helmut Ploebst’s bi-lingual study of several choreographers is a good introduction to Hoghe’s persona. Marie-Florence Ehret’s Raimund Hoghe, l’ange inachevé is a fictionalised portrait of Hoghe. Most works on Hoghe, such as Claude Chalaguer’s article ‘Rêver et contester’ rely on the specificity of Hoghe’s body. Dominic Johnson’s study is especially salient because he reflects Hoghe’s body and work as political and historical. He is also mentioned several times in Vida Midgelow’s study Reworking the Ballet in relation to his redefinition of Swan Lake. Ramsay Burt’s The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities considers, in passing, Hoghe’s male body on stage.

Siegsmund also dedicates some pages to Raimund Hoghe in his impressive study (pp. 465-72), and mainly focuses on the rituality and spirituality of his choreography, as in the following quote:

As all bodies have fallen from grace through the original sin, we need someone (and someone's body) to lift the fallen bodies to the sphere of soul. This what a dancer does. Raimund Hoghe is such a Judeo-Christian proxy. That is the reason why his small ceremonial actions on stage refer to the ritual and a strict order of events. He represents us before the

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171 Ibid., p. 367.
172 Raimund Hoghe in conversation with Bonnie Marranca, ‘Dancing the sublime’, PAJ, 32.2 (May 2010), 24-37.
memory of absence. And he does it with a body that is not apt for a beautiful dance in the classical tradition of a beautiful soul.\textsuperscript{178}

This, however, is also in order to establish the idea of the absence and longing, which is the major theme of Siegmund’s study:

Object images and music text in Hoghe's pieces create emblems of absence, which are emblems for the desire for the other, a person or an image of home, of belonging and recognition that remain always out of reach.\textsuperscript{179}

According to Siegmund, Hoghe ‘inhabits the absence that is the stage, so that he could lay his finger on the absence and mourning - the very thing that our society of consumption, live-cult and reality-TVs negates\textsuperscript{180} because ‘he remembers the things as absent and through their irritating, yet stimulating absence they keep - just as with the various absences discussed in this work - his wounds and ours, and as those of our culture, open’.\textsuperscript{181} In relation to Raimund Hoghe’s work, I take the impression of his non-typical body and the way he weaves an emotional narrative around it as a starting point for the exploration of the unresolvable tension between love for yourself and love for the O/other. However, my main thesis is that Hoghe is using sentiments as structural elements for the organization of his work.

While there has been a limited degree of coverage in the case of BADco. and Lehmen’s works, and a greater amount on Hoghe and especially Bel, as I have shown, it tends to deal with their strategies for disrupting conventional dance vocabularies. The chapters that follow use the neutral as an organizing mechanism for considering their dance theatre as a way of showing a set of relationships that reveal themselves not simply through conventional (or unconventional) compositional vocabularies, but as a side-effect that points towards a reorganisation of the aesthetic field.

\textsuperscript{178} Gerald Siegmund, \textit{Abwesenheit: Eine Performative Aesthetik des Tanzes} (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006), pp. 469-470.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., pp. 469-470.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 470.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., p. 471.
CHAPTER 1

Constructing Jérôme Bel: Stage Zero and Potentiality

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will deal with two main issues characteristic of the work of Jérôme Bel in order to map the place of the neutral in his work. The first is the construction of Jérôme Bel as an author, both by himself and by other artists, critics and theoreticians. I will attempt to unpick the construction of a particular paradoxical authorial position that Jérôme Bel is engaged with. This authorial position exists through a paradox: it is both resistant to neoliberalist ideology based on the values of active individualism, flexibility and fluidity and compliant with it. The baffling of the opposites, as I explained in the introduction to the thesis, forms the basis for Barthes’ structural definition of the neutral, which I take as a starting point for the analysis of the neutral in contemporary choreography. The second issue concerns the processes of the construction of meaning in Bel’s performances. I will argue that the key question in Bel’s performances, the question of the signifying potentials of the body also takes its shape through the activation of the notion of the neutral. Bel asks how the body signifies so that the content of that signification gives way to the processes of the production of signification and to the deployment of the signifying mechanism rather than to the content of that signification. How can the body signify the neutral, how can signification be neutralized? How can the body signify signification? In order to address these questions, I will engage with the multiple ways in which the body can signify as displayed in Bel’s opus - as surface, as text/inscription, as image, as language/sign, as ‘truth’ value statement, as object or in relation to an object. While the chapter will focus on two productions: Jérôme Bel (1996) and The Last Performance (1998) (as both a performance and a lecture), these are in many ways representative of a body of work that has explored the performative as surface.

1 An excerpt from this chapter was published in Performance Research as a separate article (Una Bauer, ‘The Movement of Embodied Thought: The Representational Game of the Stage Zero of Signification in Jérôme Bel’, Performance Research, 13.1 [June 2008], 33-39).
1.2 Welcome to ‘Jérôme Bel’
Jérôme Bel can be located among those contemporary artists and critics who explicitly express their concern with disturbing of the idea of ‘the author’ as a fixed entity and a locus for reading and organising work,2 fiercely refusing the notion of an identity limited by the perceptible boundaries of a body. In a text from 1999 Bel states that ‘there is no such thing as a single subject or a central focus (a “you” and a “me”).3 As already noted by André Lepecki,4 he follows this with an enumeration of the many bodies he conceived himself to be at the moment of writing: at least thirty-five individual and collective names, both human and animal (including for example Gilles Deleuze, Madame Bovary, Samuel Beckett, Frédéric Sequette and Lila (Sequette’s cat), ‘Hegel [unfortunately]’, David Cronenberg, Peggy Phelan, Tom Cruise, Ballet Frankfurt).5 This proclaimed dispersion of authorial identity closely linked with the problematization of subjectivity (towards its dissolution)6 can be positioned within a now recognized tradition in critical writing that, at least since 1967 and Roland Barthes’ Death of the Author,7 explicitly rejects the fixation on the biographical or personal attributes of the author as the key tools for the interpretation of his work. With it comes the denial of the unity of the text in order to rethink it as a ‘multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash’.8 The text is thus resituated as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture’.9 Theatre historian and theoretician Krassimira Kruschkova suggests that Bel attempted to de-personalise the name ‘Jérôme Bel’ by activating it as a signifier standing not for the particular

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2 The most explicit statement of this attitude can be found in Bel’s words: ‘What is important is what is said and not who says it. The personality cult is a complete aberration.’ (Interview with Gerald Siegmund, Ballettanz, Hall of Fame: Das Jahrbuch 2002 (Berlin: Friedrich Berlin Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002), pp. 24-31 (p. 30).
3 Jérôme Bel ‘Ich bin dieses Loch zwischen ihren beiden Wohnumen’ (I am the (W)hole between their Two Apartments) in Körper kön text: Das Jahrbuch der Zeitschrift Ballet International / Tanz aktuell (Berlin: Friedrich Berlin Verlag in Zusammenarbeit mit Klett Cotta, 1999), pp. 36-39 (pp. 36-37).
5 Jérôme Bel ‘Ich bin dieses Loch zwischen ihren beiden Wohnumen’, p. 36.
8 Ibid, p. 146.
9 Ibid, p. 146.
choreographic practice but solely for ‘the concept of this swindling disappearing authorship’. If we take these propositions fully on board it might initially appear futile even to approach Bel’s works as Bel’s works because that goes against the proposition of multiplicity, complexity and ‘authorlessness’ that the work is putting forward.

And yet Bel’s dismissal of his singular individual authorial identity is interrelated with a strong focus on his name as the name of the author of his performances, but also on the presence or absence of the body named ‘Jérôme Bel’ in his performances. Bel inscribes his authorship by naming a production after himself, only to then physically absent himself from it, provoking his presence to be felt as a stronger entity through its very inscription via absence (as in Jérôme Bel, 1995). He commissions another choreographer (Xavier Le Roy) to devise a choreography that he (Jérôme Bel) would be defined as the author of (Xavier Le Roy, 1999), repeatedly uses his own name (and body) to open up the questions of identity production and truth value in/of the theatre11 (The Last Performance, 1998) and places himself on stage to be asked about his own choreographic practice (Pinchet Klunchun and Myself, 2005).

Bel’s critique of authorship can only paradoxically function if he produces the idea of questioning authorship as an author – through the creation of a body of work. The name ‘Jérôme Bel’ seems to take part in the reading of the work, because of his attempt to always again unsettle the idea of what dance/choreography can be and to further challenge his earlier interrogations of this

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10 Krassimira Kruschkova ‘Actor as/and Author as “Affomer” (as Jérôme Bel as Xavier Le Roy)’, Frakcija, 20/21 (2001), 58-65.

11 It is problematic to consequently ‘categorize’ Bel’s works as either dance or performance or theatre. The problem is articulated by dance and performance theoretician André Lepecki when he discusses his experiences as a curator of the InTransit Festival 2008 in Berlin. As retold by Lepecki (in an informal discussion during InTransit Festival on 13 June 2008) when Vera Mantero, another ‘conceptual’ dance artist was asked to name her performance as dance, performance or theatre for the catalogue of the festival, she said that in this particular context (the festival was happening in the House of World Cultures in Berlin and was dealing with the issues of postcolonialism) she would call it a performance, although when she performs at dance festivals, she calls it a dance piece. The categorization of Bel’s performances is similarly dependent on the context in which they are performed. However, as I explained in the introduction, I have decided to use the term dance theatre for all of the works that I am analysing and to question Bel’s relationship with the field of dance, because he mainly performs at dance festivals and is often perceived in that context.
same idea in previous productions. The ‘Jérôme Bel’ brand depends on the knowledge of prior products; the audience needs to be familiar with the earlier strategies of the brand-cum-signifier to experience the full game play of the production. Bel’s works exist in a dialogue with each other. They problematize each other and together, in relation with each other, converse with the history of both dance and theatre, and with their conditions and conventions.

A residue of Bel’s opus is the creation of two mutually challenging levels: a construction of ‘Jérôme Bel’ as an entirely immaterial concept of production divorced from a particular body-representation and a construction of a body for that immaterial concept: a persona named ‘Jérôme Bel’ whose favourite dress combination is a pink shirt over an orange t-shirt (a combination approved by Christian Lacroix himself), 12 with a comb-over and an irresistibly charming smile. However, somewhere along the way, in this complex game, Jérôme Bel has caught up with Jérôme Bel or, as Bel himself has stated: ‘The impersonal becoming of the author-actor which was the initial project was interfered by [with] the appearance of what you [Gerald Siegmund] call a “Bel aesthetic”.’ 13

My intention here is not to expose Bel’s contradictions in order to defame him: I am not interested in claiming that, while Bel is arguing for the dispersal of authorial identity he is actually, unintentionally, confirming it and re-affirming in order to prove that his project has failed. Nor am I interested in claiming, as does Sean Burke, that ‘the return of the author […] inevitably and implicitly occurs in the practice of anti-authorial criticism’ 14 so that the concept of the death of the author can be ‘finally put to rest’. 15 What I believe is taking place in Bel’s work is that the tempting of the paradox is turned into a production strategy and is in many ways the reason for its success. For a full account of Bel’s work I suggest that one needs to try to stay in the paradox, or rather, to move within the paradox and to refuse the inclination to resolve it.

13 In the interview with Gerald Siegmund, Ballettanz; Hall of Fame: Das Jahrbuch 2002 (Berlin: Friedrich Berlin Verlagsgesellschaft, 2002), pp. 24-31 (p. 29).
15 Brian Vickers, the comment on the cover of The Death and the Return of the Author (see ibid).
It is worth probing further what I am trying to suggest here with the term ‘production strategy’. Under option d. in *The Oxford English Dictionary*,\(^\text{16}\) *strategy* is defined as ‘a plan for successful action based on the rationality and interdependence of the moves of the opposing participants’, and a quote is reproduced from 1954 Psychol. Bull. LI. 406/2 ‘A strategy is a set of personal rules for playing the game. For each possible first move [...] your opponent will have a possible set of responses.’\(^\text{17}\) Whilst the second definition only uses the word strategy as a personal, individual strategy, the first is more general – it could be read and understood, I argue, as a plan of the field in its totality, the interdependence of various particular moves on the board. Strategy could be understood as the logic of the development of the game, not only the logic of particular players in the development of the game.

### 1.3 Art world as the world of ‘belief and of the sacred’

What Bel’s work brings to the fore is the idea of the art world as the world of ‘belief and of the sacred’,\(^\text{18}\) as a game which sustains itself primarily through the investment of its players (critics, theoreticians, programmers, producers, audience) and a game which has its goal *also* in itself. We can also call the players ‘opponents’ or ‘opposing participants’ (as in the definition of strategy) to stress that they hold different positions in the field, that they occupy different places, sometimes antagonistic, sometimes harmoniously functioning together on a common goal, sometimes *both at once*. What is especially important in the aforementioned definition is ‘the interdependence’ of the various moves of ‘opposing participants’ in the construction of both a personal strategy and the strategy of the field. Strategy means working in the field, with whatever comes along, whilst taking on board and shifting one’s perception and action according to the current position of other players on the field. As Bourdieu states, ‘The work

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\(^{17}\) *OED Online*, [http://dictionary.oed.com/catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/cgi/entry/50238986/50238986se1?query_type=word&queryword=strategy&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=2&search_id=j5P8-tp1pF-6289&hilitel=50238986se1](http://dictionary.oed.com/catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/cgi/entry/50238986/50238986se1?query_type=word&queryword=strategy&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=2&search_id=j5P8-tp1pF-6289&hilitel=50238986se1) [accessed 1 April 2008].

of art is an object which exists as such only by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art.\textsuperscript{19}

So I am not arguing here for some hidden overarching intentionality in Bel’s work, some ‘master’ going under the name of Jérôme Bel who is carefully pulling the strings of his magnificent enterprise in order to achieve a particular goal, known to him in advance. Bel is merely one of the players in Bourdieu’s ‘field of position-takings’.\textsuperscript{20} The interplay of factors – author’s intentions, audience’s positions, the layering of meanings shaped by the earlier products and cultural theoreticians – serves to produce a complex positioning of authorship that pulls against Bel’s initial concept. Initially, Bel’s idea might have been to disperse the authorial function completely, but the field of reception (programmers and audience especially, scholars and academics somewhat less) wouldn’t have it. Bel was promoted into a star of the conceptual dance movement.\textsuperscript{21} His project caught up with him. Sensing that, Bel decided to play the game on a different level, accepting the paradox and playing with it, trying to balance both sides. What came to the fore was how the particular personal strategies and intentions (of various players in the field) operate ‘interdependently’ and in that operation produce various results. Those results are not pre-conceived in the mind of either an artist (Bel), or a critic, or a festival programmer, and the works of art are not their simple means of execution. Bel’s works are intrinsically shaped by dialogue in the field of production and reception. Although this is generally applicable to every work of art, there are relatively few works in the field of dance that explicitly thematize precisely these ideas, bringing them into the structure of the work itself. Such is Bel’s work.

Bel’s work fits into the category of works which themselves, unequivocally, try to create axioms of their own acceptance as art works attempting constantly to play the game by playing with the rules of the game. Such works re-think failure as intentional, half-heartedly creating the rules of the game, and stepping back if the

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{21} Jérôme Bel is a cult figure on the international dance scene’, website of Sadler’s Wells announcing his retrospective, \url{http://www.sadlerswells.com/show/Jerome-Bel-The-Show-Must-Go-On} [accessed 6 August 2008].
rules show the tendency of establishing themselves fully, as another fixed mode of operation that threatens the processes of negotiation. Bel’s work is intriguing because it is attempting both to produce itself as work whilst simultaneously making obvious the processes of its own legitimation. Sometimes, Bel gets carried away in this enterprise, falling on either side of the opposition between authorship and anti-authorship, because the constant openness of a truly dialogical mode is difficult to accomplish. This is explicitly expressed, for instance, in the lecture *The Last Performance* which is a performance, but crafted as a lecture that offers an interpretation on how we should understand the production which is also titled *The Last Performance*. Such moments both expose the undecidability, multiplicity and complexity in the erasure of the author whilst also inevitably strengthening authorship through the manifestation of modes of establishing control over the perception of the art work as an art work. The strengthening of authorship prevails if only for a brief moment before the dialogue is opened up again. Neither the death of the author nor its return can have final prevalence. It is the dialogue which is the core of the work.

Bel’s exploitation of this idea has become one of the key elements of the production of his work, and he has effectively mobilized the support of ‘the field’ - the curators and programmers who commission his work - or, they have mobilized him, in a mutually dependant process that allows for the realization of the idea. I would agree with Bourdieu when he writes that there is literally no other criteria for belonging to a field of art other than producing effects in that field (thus no metaphysical criteria that would a priori distinguish works of art from those which are not works of art).22 And it is not particularly hard to prove that Bel is producing effects in the field.23 Bel focuses on dance theatre as a game,

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22 Although Bourdieu explicitly names the literary field, the same claim is applicable to any other artistic field: ‘While it is true that every literary field is the site of a struggle over the definition of the writer (a universal proposition), the fact remains that scientific analysts, if they are not to make the mistake of universalizing the particular case, need to know that they will only ever encounter historical definitions of the writer, corresponding to a particular state of the struggle to impose the legitimate definition of the writer. There is no other criterion of membership of a field than the objective fact of producing effect within it.’ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 42.

23 For the UK reception of his work, in addition to what I have mentioned in the introduction, see for example an interview in the *International Herald Tribune* by Roslyn Sulcas, ‘Jérôme Bel: A choreographer defies convention, and earns respect’, 26 February 2008; [http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/22/arts/dancer.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/02/22/arts/dancer.php) [accessed 6 August 2008], Debra Craine,
bringing an interest in naming/branding as an act of production into this field and recognizing that the act of naming/branding has the power to transubstantiate stillness into dance (Jérôme Bel). Naming/branding also transforms the performance choreographed by somebody else (both fully in Xavier Le Roy and segments in The Last Performance and Veronique Doisneau) into Bel’s own artwork. Through the act of naming/branding, the manipulation of plain everyday objects can be perceived as choreography (Nom donné par l’auteur) and a banal opposing of cultural differences between East and West (Pynchet Klunchun and Myself) transforms into ‘a dialogue about the structure of the system of dance, about its grammar, politics and the administration that govern the formation of contemporary dance practice’. Bel’s auto-referential games are numerous and often very amusing. In Xavier Le Roy (2000), as Sylvia Staude writes, Bel ‘commited [sic.] himself in his own name to a show which (…) he left one of his colleagues, Xavier Le Roy, to create and produce’. Thus, while the piece was choreographed by Xavier Le Roy, Jérôme Bel is called its ‘author’. In the production of The Last Performance (1998), Bel uses an extract of Susanne Linke’s choreography to the music of Schubert’s ‘Wandlung’ as a ‘quote’. According to his lecture The Last Performance (2004), he was inspired by the fact that French law on authorship rights doesn’t legally regulate ‘quotations’ from dance performances, so he decided to play with the idea of ‘quotation’ in the field of dance. In Véronique Doisneau (2004) he uses choreographies by Merce Cunningham, Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, Mats Ek, Rudolf Nouryew, Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov to produce ‘his own’ choreography. Nom donné par l’auteur (1994) consists solely of two performers manipulating everyday objects such as a hair dryer, a stool, a dictionary or a vacuum cleaner while Pynchet

1 Jérôme Bel at Sadler’s Wells’, Times Online, 12 February 2008, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/dance/article3351257.ece [accessed 13 May 2008]. Bel is still touring extensively with most of his works, some of them dating from 1994 or 1995. As I have stated in the introduction, numerous theoreticians, dance scholars and artists from around Europe have touched upon his work. It is impossible to attend a dance conference in Europe where Bel is not in some way mentioned or referred to. In the UK, however, he is not well known in dance circles and his work is treated mainly as live art.


26 With Véronique Doisneau, Bel started a series of similarly structured performances, each time with a different dancer who recalls his or her life and dances excerpts from the pieces he or she performed in. The other works are Isabel Torres (2005), Lutz Förster (2009) and Cédric Andrieux (2009).
Klunchun and Myself (2005) is a dialogue between two dancers on the differences between dance practices in the East and West, with the occasional showing of other choreographed sequences from previous pieces by both Klunchun and Bel. I would now like to trace how he came to play all these ‘silly’ games and how he and the dance field negotiated that what he was doing was, indeed, choreography.

1.4 The foundations of the creation of Jérôme Bel as a choreographer

The first foothold of Bel’s production was established even before he started generating his own choreographic work. Jérôme Bel used to be a ‘proper’ dancer. He graduated from Angers’ Centre National de Danse Contemporaine in 1985. From 1985 to 1991 he danced for several renowned choreographers in France and Italy, including Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia, Daniel Larrieu, Angelin Preljocaj and Caterina Sagna, all of whom demand solid dance technique from their performers. In 1992 he worked as assistant to the director and choreographer Phillipe Découflé for the ceremonies of the XVI Winter Olympic Games in Albertville and Savoie and received an income so substantial that it allowed him not to work for the next two years. The professional dance training in an academic institution, recognition of his abilities in the form of his acceptance as a dancer in the productions of renowned choreographers and the opportunity to earn significant income (which enabled him to gain scholé - in the original Greek use of the term meaning leisure, loitering, freedom from labour that enables one to study) defined him as a professional in the dance world. His work with Découflé made him realize that ‘he liked moving people and things around’27 in the role of the director/choreographer, and he decided to dedicate himself exclusively for a period of two years to reading and cultural research, particularly authors such as Roland Barthes, Michael Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In the dance world, traditionally wary of over-intellectualization and interested in the body and its praxis, rather than the movements of mind muscles, this was still a controversial move. At the same time, the path had been prepared by dance experimentalists of the 1960s such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton who

27 From the The Last Performance (A Lecture), 2 October 2005 at Atelierfrankfurt, where he was invited by Unfriendly Takeover. Video of the performance is available from: http://www.unfriendly-takeover.de/f14_Videos.htm [accessed 19 November 2007].
anticipated the transgression of the body and human movement as the basis for choreography, even though they themselves were still very much interested in the explorations of the movement of the body. The fact that Jérôme Bel had professional dance training, came from a dance background and, as a consequence, had legitimation as a dancer together with contacts from dance networks initially facilitated a framing of his questions within or in opposition to the field of dance.

The second foothold of his production is the simultaneous appearance of an artistic community that shares Bel’s quest and questions. As I described in the introduction, Bel is a part of a particular ‘movement’ in European dance since mid-1990s often referred to as ‘conceptual’. It is important to emphasize at this point that Bel is not alone in what he is doing. Similar actions of ‘semi-objectification’ where - ‘one can situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside, in the game and on the touchline, i.e., on the margin, at the frontier, in regions which, like the ‘frame’, parergon, are so many limits, the beginning of the end, the end of the beginning […] where one can combine the profits of transgression with the profits of membership by producing the discourse that is simultaneously closest to an exemplary performance of philosophical discourse and to an exposure of the objective truth of this discourse’28 were performed by several artists in the 1990s and 2000. Xavier Le Roy utilised the form of a football match with strict rules and regulations as a form for a dance piece in Project (2003); Vera Manterro embodied the figure of Josephine Baker barely moving, in almost complete stillness in one mysterious thing, said e.e. cummings (1996); La Ribot sells her conceptual performance pieces, ‘living tableaux’, in Distinguished pieces (2001)-29 initiating the question of what is there for sale and what constitutes the objectness of a performing art piece. The point is that Bel wasn’t alone in his meta-explorations of the field of dance. There was a community of artists that started engaging with choreographing the choreography itself, and considering choreography as a language proposition. The fact of their existence also allowed Bel to be taken seriously.

29 So far, over the past 10 years, La Ribot has made around 34 of these short performances lasting from 30 seconds to 7 minutes. She intends to make 100 pieces altogether.
In order to understand in greater depth Bel’s project, it is important now to move away from one-liners that reduce his work and the work of his fellow artists to a self-reflexive joke. I will engage now with a close reading of the work that is produced once the mechanisms of its production are revealed and used as an artistic strategy. The questions are: What does that work look like when we closely examine it? What are its concrete physical manifestations? How is Bel being constructed as a choreographer, as a theatre director, as a performance maker in the mutual understandings/misunderstandings of various interpretative forces? What are the concrete choreographic propositions Bel is trying to put forward that enable him to manifest the existence of the mechanism of the production of the work of art in his work of art and how do they contribute to a particular idea of Bel as a stage artist? I will now take a look into the details of the particular practices of the production of meaning in Bel’s work, returning directly to the question of authorship later in this chapter.

1.5 Towards odourless urine: teasing the stage zero of signification

As reported in the press, legal action was instigated in 2002 against the International Dance Festival Ireland, following Bel’s performance of his piece Jérôme Bel in 2002. The Festival was sued for 38,000 euros by one of its patrons, Raymond Whitehead, a Dublin businessman, Equity member and part time actor, on the grounds that it misled the audience with regard to the ‘true’ nature of Bel’s performance which did not contain ‘a single step of dance’. According to Whitehead’s counsel, Seamus O Tuathail, ‘the performance was anything but dance and shocked and disgusted him to such an extent that he walked before the end’. Tuathail also made the point that it was ‘a particularly tasteless and vulgar performance that included an actor drooling on his penis at the same time as he

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31 Equity is the UK Trade Union representing professional performers.
urinated on stage’. As a consequence, reported the Independent, the traumatized Whitehead had not been able to attend theatre since the incident. The case was dismissed in 2004 but the Festival was still faced with legal fees of around 10,000 euros.

The publisher and regular columnist of a New York online dance magazine The Dance Insider, Paul Ben-Itzak, comments on the words of the Festival organisers who claimed that they were attempting to ‘challenge, stimulate and entertain audiences while nurturing a love and appreciation of dance as an art form’. Ben-Itzak asks: ‘But where is the challenge, besides to the stomach, in forcing an audience to watch a stage transformed into a toilet? The key words here are “breach of contract.” Mr. Whitehead expected a dance performance, and in his view, he didn’t get it. Let’s hope more audience members follow suit and hold “anti-dance” (as one newspaper characterized him) ‘dance’ artists like Jérôme Bel to account’.

There are two significant tropes in these news reports and commentaries: firstly, they suggest a familiar and exhausted image of the artist as provocateur, someone who is attacking established social norms (urinating and touching his genitals in public) and appropriately and conveniently shocking a bourgeois audience. Secondly, they reveal a particular understanding of what dance is, and at the same time offer an interpretation of how Bel is attacking that understanding. Dance pieces should not involve naked bodies, human genitals or onstage urination but they should involve dance ‘steps’. The articles even mention the cost of not following the above regulations: 10,000 euros, the legal costs the Festival was forced to pay. These news reports however never attempt a formulation of what the placement of the moment of urination and other controversial points in the

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32 See Garvey ‘“Disgusted” of Dublin’s theatre suit dismissed’.
33 See Managh ‘Disgusted “naked dancing” protestor loses court action’.
35 Raymond Whitehead was also ordered to pay his own legal fees, and though the press did not report how much these amounted to, there is evidently also a price attached to suing the Festival for not getting what you expected out of an art work. However, Judge Joseph Matthews did not, for instance, reprimand Whitehead for wasting the Court’s time. Instead, he praised him for being ‘a man of integrity and high principle, a person taking a stand on grounds of principle against what he considered had been a performance at a cultural event undeserving of the name’. See Managh ‘Disgusted “naked dancing” protestor loses court action’.
performance might be. Urination is merely treated as a universal sign that transgresses the context or structure in which it appears. If we were to judge this action according to Mr Whithead’s suit, it can only have one unproblematic meaning: that of disrespect and contempt (for the audience). By considering other accounts of this particular moment of urination in the piece Jérôme Bel we can begin to examine how the moment has been constructed in alternative ways.

Catherine Girard in Mouvement places the act of urination within the overall abstinence of the performance from the usage of any stage effects: no décor, no costumes, a simple light bulb as the only source of light, and the performer murmuring Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring as the music for the performance. Girard seems to suggest that urinating in this context simply follows the pre-set logic: usage of what is there, i.e., what is already provided by the processes of the human body displayed in the performance. Bodily fluids are simply used as a means of erasing writing on the wall. Interestingly, even though it seems Girard attempts to read the performance as an exploration into the reduction of both the means used and the signs deployed, she uses a powerful adjective here: liberating (‘the dancers use their own fluids like a liberating liquid’ [my emphasis]) which, contrary to the image offered by Whitehead’s legal counsel, yet very similar in its logic, points to an understanding of the suppression or avoidance of bodily fluids as something repressive, something which goes against the ‘naturalness’ of the body and is reminiscent of the 1960s discourse of the liberation of the body as a liberation of the self.

It is worth contrasting this view with Bel’s own understanding of what he is doing: ‘For me, dance as dance for the stage is no longer the never analysed, beautiful expression of somehow “natural” feelings through the body […] No. Not at all. (…) Everything that we know about the body, that we understand, is based on codes and language.’ Bel tries to avoid several obvious placings of himself as an artist and/or choreographer, and while doing that he is conversing with the history of contemporary dance and art. One idea he is trying to dismiss is

36 Catherine Girard, ‘The name of the author: Jérôme Bel. The name of the show: Jérôme Bel’, Mouvement, 1 December 1997.
37 Ibid.
38 Quoted in Gerald Siegmund, ‘Im Reich der Zeichen: Jérôme Bel’ (In the realm of signs: Jérôme Bel), Ballet International/Tanz Aktuell, April 1998, 34-37 (p. 36).
of an artist who insists on obscenities in order to shake the ‘stale’ politeness and appropriateness of the bourgeoisie (as with Dadaist provocations or coprophilic and scatological qualities in the work of body artists such as, for example, Stuart Brisley, Karen Finley or Andre Stitt). Another is the idea of using modern dance as a mode of emancipation from the suppression of civilizing processes and institutionalized power mechanisms. The link between dance and freedom is deeply rooted in the very foundations of modern dance (note the free personal expressions of Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and Doris Humphrey against the restraints of ballet). Dance is conceived as the expression of an inner self that posits itself against the social body.39 A further idea that Bel attempts to distance himself from is that of dance as an exploration of the logic of abstract physical movement in space – how does the body function in space (as explored conspicuously by Merce Cunningham, for example).

What he is interested in, in contrast, is the body with its signifying potential, the body as text and image, the body as a plane. Bel is keen on placing the body primarily within codes and language that he aims to control. This control is manifested in the ways in which he draws on the signifying power of the moment of urination on stage for the processes of generating meaning. It seems to me that the moment of urination carries a particular paradigmatic significance for the understanding of the strategy of meaning production in the performance. Yet the paradigmatic significance of this moment cannot be understood without looking into what precedes it in the performance, i.e. the framing of performance framed. The framing of that moment will also offer an answer to the question: how does the body signify in Jérôme Bel? The content of that signification gives way to the processes of the production of signification and to the deployment of the signifying mechanism rather than to the content of that signification.

39The following quotation from Martha Graham indicates how she instrumentalized the body and put it to the service of a self: ‘The acquiring of technique in dance has been for one purpose – so to train the body as to make possible any demand made upon it by that inner self which has the vision of what needs to be said’. Marta Graham, ‘A Modern Dancer’s Primer for Action’, in Dance as Theatre Art, ed. by Selma-Jeanne Cohen (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), pp. 136-141 (p. 139).
1.6 Jérôme Bel without Jérôme Bel

_Jérôme Bel_ (1995), Bel’s second production, starts with four naked performers entering an empty black stage. One of the performers (Gisèle Peluzelo) carries a plugged in light bulb attached to a long cable that will turn out to be the only source of light throughout the performance. She writes the name Thomas Edison on the wall behind her, thus evoking the person to whom the invention of the light bulb is accredited.

On entering the stage, the remaining three performers arrange themselves with their backs against the wall, facing the audience. One (Yseult Roch), writes ‘Igor Stravinsky’ above her head with a piece of chalk before starting to hum Stravinsky’s _The Rite of Spring_. The humming will continue through to the end of the performance or the performance will last as long as the humming lasts, however we decide to read this relationship. A pattern is already slowly discernible: what is already there is being explicitly stated or underlined. Signs are doubled. Also, writings on the wall in the first instance fix the ‘authors’ or ‘originators’ of the cultural artefacts they are most famous for. Both names fall within the area of ‘general knowledge’: they are people whose names one ‘should’ know. They are unproblematic as signs. What is performed on stage is a signification shortcut, announcing others that will follow: the moment of instant recognition of the very general facts of Western cultural history. Even though Thomas Edison is responsible for 1093 different patents, in popular perception, the light bulb is Thomas Edison and Thomas Edison is the light bulb. His identity is established and sealed off through this invention. Stravinsky’s _The Rite of Spring_ is even more indicative in that respect. Composed for Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, it is one of the most important musical works in the annals of art,\(^{40}\) inspiring huge controversy when it premiered on 29 May 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées in Paris. The audience was scandalised by both its music and

\(^{40}\) The claim for the distinguished place of _The Rite of Spring_ in the world’s cultural history does not need particular support: such is its status. It is often selected as a part of a grouping of seminal art works of the twentieth century, as with its presence within the series ‘Milestones of the Millennium’ at National Public Radio (USA), which creates a picture in sound of the pivotal events, places, movements, artists and musical works of the past 1000 years.
dance: the violent movements of the pelvis of the dancers, the emphasis on dissonance and asymmetrical rhythm, polyrhythms and polytonality, the scoring of the instruments of the orchestra in unusual and uncomfortable sounding registers, and in general, the shattering of most of the audience’s expectations around the conventions of dance. Loud boos and ferocious arguments in the audience between supporters and opponents of the work eventually turned into a riot with the police called to intervene. Offering The Rite of Spring as a soundscape for the performance immediately signals a break with well established musical practices, putting forward a proposition for alternative codes of operation. On the other hand, the act of quoting The Rite of Spring paradoxically serves to virtually abolish the status of the idea it stands for. The Rite of Spring produced a rupture in the fabric of musical (and dance) practices of that time. A musical performance cannot now repeat the rupture it caused. Quite the contrary, the effect is that of pacifying the effects of a rupture. But in the process we get a signalling towards (rather than a representation of) the idea of rupture.

The subsequent names that will ‘end up’ on the wall are Claire Haenni and Frédéric Sequette, the ‘real’ names of the other two performers. The presence of their names next to those of cultural icons at the same time disturbs and re-establishes the clear-cut distinction between those who are to be known and those who are supposedly ‘irrelevant’. Though Haenni and Sequette’s names are written on the same wall, they are only representative of their own bodies and their own bodies are only representative of them. They don’t stand for anything in terms of Western cultural history. They are defined in terms of their ‘accidental’, ‘irrelevant’ existence, not in terms of their ‘cultural products’: their names are followed by their bank account balance, height, weight, date of birth and phone numbers41 which repeats their marginality in relation to Edison and Stravinsky. Unlike Edison and Stravinsky, who are ‘a by-product of their own cultural production’,42 Haenni and Sequette ‘simply’ are. Haenni and Sequette are depersonalized, yet individualized (functioning like some sort of objective presentation of subjectivity). Their individualities are only sketched, marked with

41 Though some of the numbers are instantly recognizable, such as height and weight, the bank account number has more of a dormant existence in that it is a piece of information that cannot clearly be deciphered by the audience.
a couple of details – we can see that Sequette has an overdraft of 643 euros or that Haenni’s height is 1,72 and weight 53 kilos. But these are false clues in a way, because this is not a performance that directly thematizes the problem of the large proportions of the population in Western countries being pushed into debt by the pressures of consumerist capitalism. Neither is it a performance about obsession with weight in Western societies or about how dance as a profession gives the issue of weight a particular bio-political dimension (i.e. the ways in which the biological fact of dancer’s existence as a body becomes interpolated with her social position in terms of the profession; the height and weight of a dancer is not irrelevant as it has a direct impact on her career, and thus her social status). And yet it would be difficult to claim that these issues are not also indirectly present in this piece. All of the information that we obtain about Haenni and Sequette presents certain shells of identities - signs for identities rather than the particular identities themselves. The information is there (phone numbers, bank accounts height and weight), and yet is somehow unrepresentative of the specific thematics of the work. It functions as a paradoxical case of exposure that actually doesn’t expose anything other than exposure itself.

However, there is also another thematic that emerges from the juxtaposition of these pieces of information. Comparing the position of the names of Stravinsky and Edison with the positions of Haenni and Sequette on the wall, one thing becomes clear. Haenni and Sequette have something that the former lack in not functioning as what I earlier termed ‘a by-product of their own cultural production’. They exist in potentiality. Not in the sense of a generic potentiality: as with a child who has the potential to become a Nobel prize winner. Rather, they have the potentiality that belongs to someone who has a knowledge or ability.43

43 In his essay ‘On Potentiality’ (in Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy, ed. and trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999], pp. 177-184), Giorgio Agamben points to Aristotle’s definition of potentiality. In his discussion with Megarics (or to be more precise, in his own accounts of the discussion with Megarics, since no records exist of Megarics by Megarics), Aristotle disagrees with the former’s definition of potentiality. Megarics defined it as simply a mental concept, not a real sense of being. They argued that potentiality is only potentiality when a subject is performing a certain action. Aristotle argues that this abolishes potency as potency (if it only exists when it is realized), and he tries to establish the potentiality as a different way of being. A person who is dancing cannot have the potency to dance. And vice versa. Potency has to be established as its own category. Though Aristotle argues for the hierarchical differentiation: primacy of the existence in actuality (what exists potentially exists for the sake of existing actually), incompleteness of potentiality (as opposed to a complete substance
Because the performance is (most often) happening in the context of a dance festival, because the music that accompanies it is, historically, the score for Nijinski’s ballet, a certain set of expectations is created. We expect the performers to know how to dance. We give them the benefit of the doubt that they will at least dance, and that the dance will be the manner of their presence on stage. By not defining the particularities of their presence on stage, but a sketch of ‘some’ identities that they have, they are allowed to exist in a state of potentiality – they could be something because they are nothing specific, they are not an embodiment of a particular idea or identity. Their identity is located in that could be moment. And this could be moment does not exist in some unidentifiable space of whatever, but in a precise context of a dance theatre performance. As such it functions as a proposal on a staging of potentiality.

The initial situation sets up the key parameters for the performance: an empty stage, naked bodies, a minimal usage of props that emphasizes their functionality and an investment focused on the operation of cultural codes. A piece of chalk and, later, a Dior lipstick, are both used as writing instruments, a means of producing textual material.44 A light bulb allows us to see what is happening on the stage and evades the usage of cumbersome or overt stage technology that would avert our thinking towards the performance as a spectacle. The concentration on the usage of minimal amounts of what is there on stage, what is visible in and for what it does, further inscribes the nakedness of the performers. It is not only that the performers are naked, the whole performance attempts a state of nudity. Indeed, it is useful here to consider how Bel conceives this work:

Having been stimulated by reading Writing Degree Zero by Roland Barthes, I wondered about the ‘degree zero of a dance show’. I managed to isolate 4 elements which make up a dance show in a slightly, I admit, schematic way. The body… well, there are two in humanity, woman and

\footnotetext[44]{In the case of the Dior lipstick, the object is used functionally, but not in accordance with the function for what it was initially designed (the colouring of [female] lips).}
man. So I put two naked dancers of different sexes on stage. Music. I wanted the most zero point of music possible! I thought that a voice would be the least cumbersome and the most corporeal instrument. So I asked an actress to sing nude, on stage. The choice of music conformed to dramaturgic choices which it would be tedious to describe here but all the same I fixed my choice on Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*, a work which enabled me to link the piece to the field of dance. The light was more of a problem, the zero point of light obviously being the sun… and it would have been quite difficult to perform outside with naked actors on stage in our temperate climates. So I finally chose the zero point of electric light! I therefore asked a naked actress to light the stage with a simple electric torch, which remains the same as the one invented by Thomas Edison.\(^{45}\)

Reading Bel’s statements one becomes aware of the constructedness of degree zero when it transfers from an abstract level to the level of human bodies on stage. At first reading, the story seems plausible: two sexes, bare human voice, the light bulb. And yet, all of these equations might very easily not be there at all: the neutrality of a naked human body on stage? What could be less neutral than the naked human body in or outside the field of art? It almost guarantees controversy. The harsh sounding, irritatingly high pitched, and for the most part completely out of tune human voice singing *The Rite of Spring* again appears anything but neutral. The same goes for the focusing on the biological differences of two sexes at a time when gender studies have effectively problematized such gender distinctions. The emphasis in Jérôme Bel is on difference, on drawing attention to its dissonance.

I would argue that a complex game is at stake here. While arguing that it is trying to represent neutrality or a zero degree of signification on stage, what Bel’s work actually demonstrates is a particular sign construction which inspires the movement of thought (of the audience) dealing with the representation of neutrality. The work incentivizes the audience to think about neutrality as a signifying moment. It is playing tricks with processes of representation and effectively unravelling their operation. The force of the neutral opposes its representation. This is not because the elements that Bel chooses cannot be perceived as neutral (and that some other elements unproblematically and easily

could), but rather that neutral or stage zero can never be neutral enough or zero enough. The neutral always creates a desire and a space to be even more subtle, even less expressive, even less visible and less affirming. The neutral is a term in motion. An attempt at its representation nevertheless produces a tension or choreography between those two positions (the neutral and its impossibility) and this effectively becomes the true object of the performance. This is a representational game, a jeu of signs as signs where the very failure of representation allows them to be exposed as sings. Yet one has to be aware of the attempt at representing neutrality for the game to work, which is why Bel is so explicit and literal about what he is trying to do in his work. The interview functions for Bel as a mode of extending the production, a way of providing a context for its reception. It has to sound and appear convincing in the first instance.

Bel is trying to stimulate discussion around the processes of neutrality on stage: that is why his representation of neutrality has to lack. Or rather, and to be more precise, that is why he chooses to deal with neutrality in the first place. Because neutrality or zero degree of signification refuses us the satisfaction of its full presence, it is read as a sign, as an attempt, unfixed in an actualization of that attempt. And therefore the play with representation, the perception of representation as a game is ensured.

After performing the work with Yseult Roch for 13 years, during a London retrospective of his work at Sadler’s Wells in 2008, ‘Showtime Jérôme Bel 1994-2005’, for the first time, Jérôme Bel was performed instead with a CD player. It is worth dwelling on why Bel could replace Yseult Roch and her murmuring of The Rite of Spring with a CD of the work in its full orchestral performance, reproduced from a CD player. What he needed was a sign that could contribute to the overall construction of the zero degree of dance. Playing a CD from a CD

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46 In an interview with Bel I asked him: ‘Do you think that part of your artistic work is the production of discourse around your artistic work and around yourself? Or is there any difference between those two moments?’ and he replied ‘My artistic project has always been to produce discourses. But unfortunately my performances produced a lot of misinterpretations until Veronique Doisneau and Pichet Klunchun & Myself that most of the people have understood. I don't make any difference between artistic works and discourses. They are the same for me.’ (Una Bauer, ‘Jérôme Bel: An Interview’, Performance Research, 13.1 [June 2008], 42-48 (p. 46).
player on stage, from the beginning to the end, embodies that option, because it indicates non-performance. A performer has simply put a CD on, no other intervention has occurred, nothing has actually been performed in that moment. The CD player just sits there, on the stage, exposed as are the naked bodies. While the out of tune singing of Yseult Roch creates the environment for the stage zero of dance because she only relies on her voice, playing a CD from a CD player on stage can also indicate stage zero of dance for completely opposite reasons: precisely because it reveals itself for what it is and does not in any way depend on a theatrical transformation. Both Yseult’s singing and putting the CD on are therefore interchangeable as unstable signs for the ‘stage zero of dance’.

After Claire and Frédéric have exposed their name, their bank account number, their height and weight, their telephone number and other empirical (numerical) data that confirms their identity and existence, and repeated it through the act of writing it on the wall, they move on to an exploration of what the body can do with itself on its surface, the kinds of images and/or ideas the body’s surface can produce in and of itself, and, the body as a given in the state in which it first emerged at birth, continuing with the game of ‘resistance to representation’.

Claire and Frédéric explore the facticity of their own bodies, what the body can do with what is there: the skin under and between Claire’s breasts that can be pulled and folded over itself and even over the breast, the skin of the neck which, when pulled, fills the performer’s hand completely; the gentle skin above the pubic hair which, when stretched, makes the area covering the pelvis grow to disproportionate dimensions, displaying the utter vulnerability and complete exposure of being. These actions do not activate the body’s kinetic energy realized through motion but focus instead on the exploration of its potential energy, an energy stored within a physical system, such as the elasticity of the skin. They introduce a dynamic element into the static (skin is rarely activated in contemporary dance performances). The dynamic I am talking about is the dynamic complementary with the dynamic of signification procedure that Bel is affirming: the dynamic of the static.

47 Rare examples of the involvement of skin surface in dance can be seen in Russel Maliphant’s extremely virtuosic performances, as with Liquid Reflex from 1999.
7. Bareliness or in-betweenness: shaking illustration out of its dullness

Frédéric Sequette pulls his skin over his scrotum disfiguring the penis completely by turning it into a round ball. He then rubs the hairs on his thigh hard until they loose their natural horizontal flow and turn into blots of entangled curls. He bites a piece of his nail off, licks the hairs on his arm until they are neatly glued to his arm, and then pulls the nail across the surface of the arm, creating a parting. This image operates under certain conditions or a certain rule: it is *barely* an image, it operates on the verge of portrayal or depiction. It operates in that tense moment *between* attempting to point towards an image, an image of something other than the bareness of what is in front of us, and refusing to offer any image we can recognize or connect with other images into a coherent and stable referencing structure. It operates in the moment of *bareliness*. A similar thing, though not the same, happens when Sequette and Claire Haenni write a certain combination of numbers around their belly. These numbers resemble dates, but we cannot be sure whether they are dates, or rather what are they the dates of. Unless a date is a date of something specified it operates again as barely a date.

Another moment of resistance to representation in *Jérôme Bel* tends towards the other extreme; towards a complete and clear recognition of the object the sign represents to the point of banality, a blinding directness. The coexistence of a sign with the object the sign is pointing to effectively doubles what is already there. This is obvious in two examples: Sequette uses red lipstick to draw an image of the heart as an organ (not the symbol of the heart) on Haenni’s back and then ‘activates’ the heart by moving the skin. The heart drawn on the surface of the skin begins to ‘pound’ as a result of Sequette alternating between pulling and releasing the skin. Thus Haenni gets a second heart, a heart drawn with a lipstick, fully recognizable as a heart which repeats the movement occurring on the inside of the body, by bringing it towards the surface. This exists as a rudimentary sign, as an icon, of a low level of complexity and abstraction. It doesn’t require the encoding of a complex set of cultural codes but it seems instantly recognizable by virtue of similarity with the object it represents. It is, in the words of Gertrude Stein, ‘dull’.

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Any of you when you write you try to remember what you are about to write and you will see immediately how lifeless the writing becomes that is why expository writing is so dull because it is all remembered, that is why illustration is so dull because you remember what somebody looked like and you make your illustration look like it [my emphasis]. The minute your memory functions while you are doing anything it may be very popular but actually it is dull.48

In another instance, we see Sequette drawing something on his palm, again with the lipstick. His next action is to slap Haenni across her ribs with his palm, leaving clearly visible red letters ‘AIE’ (ouch) as a consequence of his slap for the audience to read. Haenni is slapped and her body produced a sound that we see as an image, a sequence of letters on the surface of her skin.

And yet, this illustration which only serves to repeat what has been done, is shaken out of its dullness (or naming which does nothing but repeat what has been done) through its positioning. The main problem of/with representation is that it lures the viewer into the rules of that which it is representing, into the ideological structures of that which it is representing. In Jérôme Bel illustration is actualized as the very tool of the resistance to representation. This is achieved by placing this moment of literalism in the midst of different moments: those that are already questioning the moments of representation through the problematization of the representation of identity or through the problematization of the moment of representation of neutrality, and through the images that exist as barely images. All those potentialities, dynamic (failed) neutralities, or almost images produce the problematization of literal images. The extreme transparency and literalness, especially under the influence of opposite forces, are encouraged to feed into a philosophical fantasy of finding complexity in simplicity. The images generate a desire for the construction of an ‘original’, ‘creative’, ‘imaginative’ interpretation.

It couldn’t possibly be just a pounding heart drawn with a lipstick on the dancer’s back, could it? There is a particular logic of investment at stake which operates in the production of the work and which the work appears to run contrary to: what would be the reason for presenting such childish games in the theatre after

investing years of education into understanding the sophisticated cultural codes that govern a theatrical production?

Bel’s work thus moves between two poles in the obstruction of representation, activating the ones in between as well. The first is of utter, obvious representability. Those representations stand for their objects because they have an actual resemblance to them. The peculiarity of such representations is that they do not determine their objects — paradoxically, because they resemble the objects they represent, to a great extent they stand for anything more or less. The operation of representation is performed at the most banal level (the drawing of a heart animated into a pounding heart), and it is easy for everyone to see what is happening. And yet, because of this extreme transparency, the moment of representation of the performance Jérôme Bel is deferred and/or looped back onto itself. The simple answer to the question ‘What does it mean?’ – ‘It means a pounding heart’ brings us back to the performance act as the explanation of its meaning. This circular action is unresolvable in its circularity and produces the deferral of meaning as explicit; it produces disturbance in the moment of representation.

The other pole is the production of dormant signs: signs whose meaning cannot be fully activated in the act of performance itself but require additional knowledge: the fact that Haenni and Sequette’s names are indeed the real names of dancers/performers, the fact that the date written around Sequette’s belly is the date of his birth, and the date written above Haenni’s pubic hairs is the date she lost her virginity. And the moment in-between those two poles is the moment of betweenness: the moment that can never be resolved because it does not rely on some type of external knowledge one needs to acquire, but is pulsating in the moment of performance.

Bel’s resistance to representation suggests the potentialities of the play with representation. Rather than perceive it as undesirable imprisoning Bel uses it as the strategy for his interrogation of the concept of representation. Representation, however, functions as imprisonment only if it is understood as total and complete,
only if it fixes the level of interpretation on what it represents. But it can also be used as a strategy for the struggle against itself.

1.8 Back to urination

Considering representation in this way as a game allows us to observe closely how the moment of urination is placed in the performance. Towards the very end of the performance, both performers start urinating, Frédéric standing up, Claire squatting. The moment of urination is neither particularly exposed nor covered. Sequette’s face remains expressionless; he does not touch his penis but lets the fluid out in a manner that appears effortless. The only source of light on the stage is not pointed directly towards them, nor is it completely withdrawn: they are performing this action in semi-darkness. Once the liquid leaves their body, they take it in their hands and use it to erase the writings on the wall (Claire and Frédéric’s data, the names of Thomas Edison and Igor Stravinsky) following the already established mechanism of creating and erasing superimposed images or images that defy easy readings because in their obvious simplicity they deny their relation to a referent. The performers do not erase all the letters, and the remaining ones read ‘Eric chante Sting’ which, on one level is a simple description of the last scene of the performance: a fully dressed man enters the stage to sing ‘I’m an Alien, I’m a legal Alien…’ repeating verbally his condition of being dressed in the company of nude bodies. Urine, a natural bodily fluid, is used for a simultaneous erasure and disclosure of signs. What is emphasized by ‘revealing’ Sting’s song with urine is Bel’s attempt at the production of signs alienated from their constructive contexts, disturbed out of their conventional framings, disjointed from their fixity into different possibilities of understanding. As German dance critic Arnd Weseman suggests about Bel’s usage of urine: ‘there is nothing dirty about it whatsoever’. Rather, this urine seems ‘fit for the stage,

49 ‘Englishman in New York’ is a well known song by Sting from his 1987 album … Nothing Like The Sun. The song is inspired by Quentin Crisp (1908-1999), a witty and ‘eccentric’ public persona who was openly living his homosexuality, causing controversy with his caustic humour both in his native (conservative) England of the 1950s and in the politically correct USA (where he moved in 1981) of the 1990s. ‘Englishman in New York’ is generally understood as a sort of anthem of misfits and eccentrics.
transparent, odourless’. As such, it is pushed out of the modes through which it is habitually seen. However, in the moment when the performers stick their hands in urine, it is very difficult not to feel physically disgusted by their actions. The disgust that we experience is a bodily reaction but it is not the one we were born with, it is not a biological reflex: quite the contrary, children have to be trained into finding urine and faeces repulsive. Toilet training, according to many psychologists, is one of the most formative events of the human psyche because it is the child’s first introduction to the fact that social structures can take precedence over bodily demands. In the moment when the performers touch their urine with their naked hands, years of social training in finding urine repulsive are playing a role in how the audience receive the act. As an audience witnessing this performance we are constantly in movement between two poles: one is the pole of being able to find urine neutral, the other one is the inability to do so. The effect of estrangement does not lie in Bel’s success (or lack of it) at presenting urine as an ‘odourless liquid’ but in the moment between the socially and culturally constructed difficulty of seeing urine as an odourless liquid, and the attempt at presenting it as such, which turns ‘urine’ into a sign caught somewhere in between opposing forces: our social training and conditioning and the possibility of thinking beyond it.

I argue that Bel’s work as a choreographer involves creating the movement of thought (an embodied thought, because we very much feel the disgust when we watch hands soaked in urine spreading the liquid across the back wall). Bel’s project creates a movement: a movement created as a result of not being able to settle ourselves either in the perception of urine as ‘odourless liquid’, or in the traditional perception of urine as disgusting.

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52 Closely related, of course, with the biological facts that urine and faeces are what remains after an organism has used all the nutritive qualities from food and disposed of toxins and pathogens. The treatment of faeces is, clearly, the matter of hygiene, since faeces can contribute to spreading of diseases and intestinal parasites.
It is, thus, inappropriate to dismiss the legal actions provoked by seeing Jérôme Bel as a simple misunderstanding on the part of Whitehead of the performance, his own close-mindedness or a lack of familiarity with a particular stream in contemporary dance and performance art. Rather it serves as an act of contribution to the performance’s teasing of sign systems and the way they operate: an actualization of the production’s tensions. However financially dangerous Whitehead’s reaction might have been for the festival had he won the case, it contributes to the logic of performance. It is not outside of it, because it emphasizes the tension through which the piece engages its audience.

Whitehead’s reaction is important in the way it so clearly (and with such emotional investment) demonstrates a social reality, a particular frozen understanding of what urine stands for, and what dance does not stand for. But the performance does not formulate itself in the opposition to Whitehead and is not settled in that opposition: it does not promote another firm social reality (urine as liberating liquid) but stages a dialogue between the two and between our understanding of them. Though Whitehead’s reaction is important, it is however, misleading in the way in which it fixes these oppositions in their antagonistic positions, trying to exclude Bel from the game (as an artist, as a choreographer).

The two positions stand in a dialogical relationship, and it is this dialogue that is staged, it is this movement of thought that Bel is choreographing in Jérôme Bel.

In regard to dance, Bel’s proposition is not the definite: ‘urinating on stage is also dance!’ . Bel does not attempt to pacify that question by providing it with a definite answer but rather opens a dialogue around what choreography is and how it is constructed and understood.

1.9 Potentiality as a performance ontology

Through a series of signals scattered around the performance - nude bodies, bare stage, the minimal use of technology, the voice of the performer, the usage of urine and saliva, the activation of bodily hairs and skin the performance probes the idea of bare life: an unqualified life, life simply as a pure matter; non-individualized life; stage zero of life; life itself, rather than life of a person. Bare life is a concept developed by Giorgio Agamben in Homo Sacer: Sovereign
Power and Bare Life. It comes from Agamben’s exploration of the idea that Greeks used two terms that are semantically and morphologically distinct from what we understand by the word ‘life’ today. They used the term *bios* for the way of living proper either to an individual or to a group, as in *bios theoreticos* (contemplative life of a philosopher) or *bios politicos* (the political life). Zoe on the other hand indicated the fact of living common to all living beings, the *unqualified* life, natural life, life as such, the mere fact of living itself. Natural life, in the Greek world is not recognized within the *polis*, but exists outside of it, in the domain of *oikos* or home. In the privacy of one’s own home, basic functions for the preservation and continuation of life take place: reproduction, bodily waste discharge and alike.

Agamben’s quest happens in the opposition between un-political, un-social life (biological life) and political life. He is trying to reconsider the Greek separation between *zoe* and *bios* and to claim that this opposition is in fact an implication of the first in the second, so that the bare life is implied in the politically / individually qualified life. Agamben finds the link between bare life and politics to be parallel to the link between *phone* and *logos*, voice or sound (vibration of matter) and language (system of arbitrary yet agreed-upon symbols). Voice/sound is the pure matter, while language is a qualified system that turns matter into a series of organised particularities. Bare life is parallel to degree zero, they both attempt at suspension of the order: bare life of political order, degree zero of the order of signification.

The stage zero of signification (and/or bare life) is problematic because it has a double existence: it is at the same time outside and inside of the order of signification. By existing, it suspends the order’s own validity. To signify to the point zero means to suspend the validity of signifying order, of the totalitarianism of signification, to place itself outside the operation of signification. So what is the situation and the structure of stage zero, since it consists of nothing other than the suspension of the rule? Bare life can only exist as a signal of the paradox of the impossibility of bare life as a fixed, defined entity.

Katherina Zakravsky recognizes this as the main problem of bare life:
If taken as signifying something like a biological core that could be bared by peeling off all cultural and social layers of a human being, ‘bare life’ is revealed as something like a test; as this very definition of reduction by peeling is exactly the biopolitical ideology that accompanies the very relation between sovereignty and political subjectivity. The act of reduction that wants to state a reality outside of politics and society is in itself a political act denying its own political impact.\textsuperscript{53}

Bare life doesn’t exist as an entity, but rather it is merely a weak concept, whose existence entirely depends on the existence of everything that it isn’t. It exists as a pull towards something, not as something itself. And to top it all, it is politically impotent, what Zakravsky refers to above as ‘a political act denying its own political impact’.

‘Bare life’ resembles a kind of suction that pretends to go beyond all social structures thus introducing a social function of its own: the function of denying and cancelling social relations. In this sense, ‘bare life’ is conceptually anorectic; it can never be bare enough. Outside of the social and artificial sphere there is simply nothing, nothing but the limit to define a sphere, a zone without an outside. There are structural reasons why ‘bare life’ is so closely linked to annihilation, extermination and the license to kill without sacrificing. As the stable core of ‘bare life’ can never be touched the lack of ‘bare life’ is introducing a violent impulse in the subject struck by the delusion of being able to strip someone to bare life. (…) ‘Bare life’ could be described as a decomplexifying function in an overcomplex environment – similar to Luhmann’s description of ‘love’ as a function without a particular function that just cuts across the whole system of functional differentiation to make the claim of not loving a function or a role but a person as a whole. The very introduction of this function as a horizon of expectation already implies the impossibility of its fulfilment. As justified as every doubt against ‘bare life’ as ontological delusion may be – and Agamben is aware if these problems – as irreducible is ‘bare life’ as a limit concept of discourse. ‘Bare life’ is its own.\textsuperscript{54}

The problem that Bel is facing is, thus, twofold. On one level, he is dealing with the question of the staging of bare life. How can voice/sound be found in


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
language? How can the voice be perceived as a consequence of language and not that which comes before the system is put in place? And the other level is the question of whether there could be any value in the concept of bare life and the game of its staging in theatre and if so, what is its value? What does bare life bring to the stage? As we have already suggested, bare life is not that which exists before qualified life, or bios, but that which exists as the consequence of qualified life, produced by that very qualified life. Qualified life produces bare life as its opposition and its horizon of understanding. There is no bare life without highly complex life; it is unimaginable. Bare life is the product of highly complex life. The very idea of bare life can only exist as that which is thought about as not-qualified life. Stage zero of signification can only be produced through and in a dialogical relation with full power signification mechanisms. But at the same time, bare life brings disturbance into the signification mechanisms. It is important to recognize that it doesn’t exist as a fixed concept. It is a mobile, moving, trembling concept that disturbs the field of fixed meanings.

Zakravsky is right when she says that bare life is never bare enough: it is a product of signification which tries to delete itself. It is a weak concept, dependent on others. But that is precisely what makes it interesting. Bare life is a concept which has to be thought in motion. It is an active moving concept that does not allow the representation to settle, and the movement of bare life as a concept can be perceived as a value in itself. We cannot think bare life without the order of signification, because the order of signification is what produces it, but once it produces it, it produces it as that which is outside of the order of signification - bare. When we look at the moment of urination, the production of urine as neutral can only be considered in contrast with urine as filthy and contagious. Firstly we think of urine as filthy and contagious, then we think of urine as neutral. But we can’t stop there – we immediately slip back into the filthiness of urine.

Jérôme Bel seems to manifest what I have just described. But at the same time the production reveals the underlying assumptions of the present historical state of dance and theatre: it seems that dance practice constituted itself through the exclusion of the natural body / bare life / unqualified life / the untrained performer from the processes of producing meaning. The Otherness of the ‘bare body’
facilitated the creation of the discipline of dance theatre. The virtuosity in dance is constructed through the exclusion of the normal, unskilled body. Yet today’s dance practices suggest the opposite: the production of the bare body as a consequence of the refusal to perform virtuosity. Today’s dance practices reveal an interesting point about the nature of the problem. They reveal that the bare body in dance as art did not really exist before the virtuous body. And the production of this natural body through sign manipulation becomes the primary activity of ‘conceptual’ contemporary dance. The ‘bare body’ is the desired object of a particular ‘movement’ or ‘stream’ in contemporary dance. The fact that it is found in the core of the construction of signification, not outside of it or prior to it, makes it even more interesting. The ‘bare body’ does not need to be excluded from performance / theatre / dance for all to retain their ontology. The bare body can be observed and thematized in theatre, because it is already in theatre; it is the result of the production of theatre signs. Neutral urine comes as an idea after dirty urine, not before it. It can be purified only after it was already dirtied.

But, still, what is interesting in the production of bare life on stage? The answer is structural, not thematical. Bare life guarantees the movement of thought. Furthermore, bare life, itself invoked, is an invocation of something else. It is an invocation of a state of potentiality, the potentiality of life itself, the potentiality as a way of being. In The Coming Community, Giorgio Agamben writes:

If human beings were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible... This does not mean, however, that humans are not, and do not have to be, something, that they are simply consigned to nothingness and therefore can freely decide whether to be or not to be, to adopt or not to adopt this or that destiny (nihilism and decisionism coincide at this point). There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this is not an essence nor properly a thing: It is the simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality.\footnote{Giorgio Agamben, \textit{The Coming Community} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 43.}

The emptiness of Bel’s performance Jérôme Bel and the reduction of the theatrical elements employed point towards a certain perspective on the condition of human existence: the looseness articulated in the earlier quotation. Therefore the
emptiness of the performance co-exists with the initial existential emptiness of the human condition. The dramaturgical method of voiding signification from the performance operates simultaneously as the performance is ‘filled’ with content. The human condition is understood as that which is neither determined by free will nor by destiny, but operates somewhere in between, in the domain of possibility. It repeats the way the signified is joined with the signifier: not completely arbitrary, but far from fixed and pre-determined. As human beings, we operate in the perpetual state of potentiality.

What is the relationship between potentiality and the neutral? If potentiality was a grammatical tense, and if the neutral was a verb, the neutral would predominately occur in that tense. (As an example, the verb ‘to bear’ is almost exclusively used in a past tense, and not in a future tense, although it is not grammatically incorrect to say: I will be born.) The neutral is always in the state of potentiality. It is always something to look forwards to, to look towards. However, I agree with Aristotle when he claims that even though it is ontologically weak, the state of potentiality still is a state of being.

1.10 Postproduction

Having closely observed how Bel treats the signifying mechanisms in Jérôme Bel, I would now like to return to question of authorship and its development in Bel’s opus. I have already stated that Bel changed his strategy from the insistence on the dispersion of authorial identity towards the dialogue between the two poles: authorial and anti-authorial. Bel’s way of dealing with the question of authorship repeats the figure of neutrality, as ‘every inflection that, dodging or baffling the paradigmatic, oppositional structure of meaning, aims at the suspension of the conflictual basis of discourse’. 56 After a period spent formulating his language as an artist in the performances Nom donné par l’auteur (1994), Shirtology (1997), and, especially, Jérôme Bel (1995), his international recognition allowed for a more playful engagement with the questions of authorship and with it, issues of

the status of the work of art. In this second period of his work, Bel refrains even more resolutely from production as an active creation of difference and explores production as re-contextualization of what is already in existence and therefore known.

The French curator and art critic, Nicholas Bourriaud, develops the idea of ‘postproduction’ mainly in relation to a group of visual artists that rose to prominence in the 1990s (Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio Cattelan, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster). It seems to me that this notion can offer some insights into the way Bel’s work operates after The Last Performance (1998).

Postproduction for Bourriaud is a recourse to previously produced forms: ‘a willingness to inscribe the work of art within a network of signs and significations instead of considering it an autonomous or original form’.\(^{57}\) It is about finding ways of inserting the piece within the innumerable production synergies, shifting from structured compositional forms to the fluidity of an economy. ‘Artists today programme forms more than they compose them ... [They] remix available forms and make use of data’.\(^{58}\) For Bourriaud the prefix ‘post’ does not signal any negation or surpassing; it refers to a zone of activity.

The processes in question here do not consist of producing images of images [...] or of lamenting the fact that everything has ‘already been done’, but of inventing protocols for use for all existing modes of representation and all formal structures. It is a matter of seizing all the codes of culture, all the forms of everyday life, the works of the global patrimony, and making them function. To learn how to use forms, as the artists in question invite us to do, is above all to know how to make them one’s own, to inhabit them.\(^{59}\)

What Bel is doing in the postproduction period of his work is turning communication / promotion / interpretation strategies for communication / promotion / interpretation of his work even more radically into the work itself. He is creating protocols for the use of his work rather than creating the work itself.

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\(^{58}\) Ibid, p. 17.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, pp. 17-18.
On 26 February 2004 in the Hebbel am Ufer theatre in Berlin, Bel first performed *The Last Performance (a Lecture)*. As I mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, the piece is a lecture on his 1998 production, also entitled *The Last Performance*. There is a short presentational text on his website which describes the evolution of the lecture:  
60 ‘I would like to change my medium and to use the tool of the lecture to try to articulate better the stakes of *The Last Performance*’.  
61 However, the work is presented under the ‘performances’ section together with an archive showing an extensive *touring* schedule.  
62 Touring is a word associated with rock concerts or dance and theatre performances, rarely with lectures. It is even more unusual for a choreographer to ‘tour’ with his lecture, for the tool for the expression of a choreographer is, traditionally, the body. Bel exploits and plays with the fact that the performance-lecture falls between media, thus questioning our expectations as an audience if a lecture is ‘performed’. He seems to be asking about the interpretative codes that are applicable or function in such cases. Additionally, he risks the possibility of acknowledging failure. If a choreographer speaks, not about the process of creation of his work (which is fairly usual), but performs an explicit de-coding of the underlying assumptions behind his or her own performance, s/he risks accusations of either attempting to control the potential interpretations of her/his work or simply failing in her/his attempts – the work fails to produce the meaning as a *work*. This seems like a suspicious strategy: an author who on the one hand presents himself as interested in destabilizing the production of meaning turns into an author-dictator, who attempts to control not only the immediate conditions of the production of his performance but the conditions of its reception as well. Bel might be accused of not playing fairly by disrespecting the rules of the game and the division of labour: author and critic, author and academic grounded on opposite poles ensure

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60 See www.jeromebel.fr [accessed 19 November 2007].

61 Ibid.

62 The piece has been seen at the following festivals and venues: Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin, February 2004), Tanzquartier Wien (Vienna, March 2004), Centre Nationale de la Danse (Paris, September and October 2004), TheaterWorks (Singapore, December 2004), Maison de France (Rio de Janeiro, February 2005), Novadança (Brazilia, February 2005), Itau Cultural (Sao Paulo, February 2005), Contemporanea (Prato, June 2005), Body Mind (Warsaw, June 2005), La Batie (Geneva, September 2005), Unfriendly Takeover (Frankfurt October 2005), La Box (Bourges, March 2006), Centre Messiaen (Champigny, March 2006), La Force de l’Art (Paris, May 2006), Göteborg Dance and Theatre Festival (Göteborg, August 2006), New Dance House (Bucharest, May 2007).
compliance with a certain ethical code that enables (I would even say produces) the quality of a work. Mixing the interests of author and critic serves to blur positions that have ethical implications for the shaping of interpretative discourses. Of course authors have been producing reviews/previews in the form of programme notes for decades but they haven’t considered them to be the part of the work itself or performed them as the work itself. However, the perception of Bel as a controller of the meaning of his work only happens if we assume that what he wants to do is promote a particular concept of reception articulated by Umberto Eco as ‘open’ (and then dramatically fails at it). Eco gives the following description of open works: ‘In primitive terms we can say that they are quite literally unfinished: the author seems to hand them on to the performer more or less like the components of a construction kit. He seems to be unconcerned about the manner of their eventual deployment’. But Bel is more someone who repositions existing structures and creates the context for the reception, rather than attempting to create an open structure or ‘a form without […] an external necessity which definitely prescribes the organization of the work in hand’.  

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63 This is analogous in a way to peer-reviewing which guarantees that published articles undergo a rigorous process of evaluation by experts in the field. The process of peer-reviewing ensures quality but also creates that quality by attributing great value to the act of peer-reviewing itself as the guarantor of quality.


65 Ibid.
Image 3: Photo found on Dance Theatre Workshop Blog,  
http://www.dancetheaterworkshop.org/blog/2008/09/04/jerome-bel-at-fiaf-on-sept-10/ 
[accessed 22 November 2010]
In the presentational photo for the performance-lecture Bel’s head is covered with a yellow fishing cap whose rim almost covers his eyes, his head bent sideways. He is wearing a bright orange shirt that spells out ‘Welcome to Estonia’ (the letters Est are emphasized). Due to the way his left arm is bent towards the camera, the impression is given that he is the one holding the camera. The angle under which his head is bent might simply be a consequence of his trying to fit into the frame of the image. It nevertheless creates a general sense of unsteadiness and also conveys the impression that he is presenting himself as a court jester, and a jester coming from a corner of Eastern Europe. For a Western audience, Estonia has no particular cultural ‘flavour’ in the mode of France or England. As such, it merely denotes ‘the East of the West’, the far margins of the Western consciousness. In this presentation it feels as if Bel is trying to blur the traces, to de-particularize his origins and locate himself more in the no man’s land of art as a social and political practice. The desire for neutrality is similarly present here. The implication seems to be that he wants to be a part of an East as East that is immaterial; the East as a gesture of political and social criticism, rather than a place of a particular, defined and framed identity.

He begins the lecture\(^{66}\) by stating that after almost seven years of performing the piece *The Last Performance*, he feels that very few people have understood it. Therefore, in his lecture he will attempt to explain why the piece was very interesting. The audience is already giggling, probably at the combination of arrogance and boldness, coyness and charm with which he is delivering his lecture. The impression of a carefully constructed ambivalence is supported by his appearance – he is wearing several layers of shirts in different, screaming colours: a pink buttoned down shirt over a red and orange undershirt. An orderly shock of hair deliberately swept across the bald patch on his forehead leaves the audience unsure whether his appearance should be read as a parody of a particular self-conscious masculinity sensitive about the loss of hair or an attempt at being nonchalantly stylish. Often a statement is followed by the playful gesticulation of

\(^{66}\) Performance of the lecture he was invited to give by Unfriendly Takeover, on 2 October 2005 at Atelierfrankfurt. A video of the performance is available from: [http://www.unfriendly-takeover.de/f14_Videos.htm](http://www.unfriendly-takeover.de/f14_Videos.htm) [accessed 19 November 2007].
his arms. Bel then smiles or even bursts out laughing giving an impression of a mischievous boy who can’t quite believe what he is saying.

It is fairly easy to describe The Last Performance (1998). There are four performers who enter the (again) empty stage in turns. Frédéric Sequette is the first to enter. He says: ‘Je suis Jérôme Bel’ and stands still for a few moments until his wristwatch alarm rings. Once he leaves the stage, Jérôme Bel enters, dressed like a tennis player and carrying a tennis racquet. After saying ‘I am André Agassi’ he starts to play tennis hitting the ball against the back wall of the performance space. He is indeed playing tennis, but his game in no way resembles the virtuosity of Agassi, and what is more important, makes no attempt at imitating this virtuosity. The next performer to emerge is Antonio Carallo dressed in medieval attire. He states: ‘I am Hamlet’, looks at the knife in his hand and then delivers the beginning of the famous soliloquy ‘To be…’ leaving the stage midway so we hear only his voice from somewhere off stage as he continues the phrase ‘… or not to be…’ Returning to the stage he completes the phrase ‘… - that is the question’. Claire Haenni is the last performer to emerge, barefoot, dressed in a flimsy white dress, with the accompanying phrase: ‘Ich bin Susanne Linke’. She performs a part from, what the audience assumes to be, Susanne Linke’s choreography.\(^67\) When she leaves the stage, Bel returns, dressed as Linke (or dressed as Haenni dressed as Linke), and performs the same choreographic sequence. His departure is followed by Carallo and Sequette, one after the other, performing the same action, again dressed as Linke.

1.11 Degrees of (non)existence

The simplicity of the structure tricks and discorcents. Performers come on stage to announce their identity. There are three schematic moments of these announcements: one is verbal, a simple statement, the second is the costumes that they wear and the third is the movement they perform. The three levels function in relation with each other, and it is this relationship which brings forward the difference in the theatrical existence of performers on stage: the difference

\(^67\) It is an extract from her choreography Wandlung from 1978 with music by Franz Schubert.
between *on* and *off*, action and its presence and absence, and the existing spectrum in that difference, the distinction of levels of ‘truthfulness’. Whereas ‘Andre Agassi’ at least plays tennis (it is almost as if playing tennis could be in inverted commas because, clearly, ‘Agassi’ does not play tennis like *that*; yet it needn’t be in inverted commas because, however bad it is, it still is the action of playing tennis) and ‘Susanne Linke’ dances, neither ‘Hamlet’ nor ‘Bel’ appear to be *doing* anything particular and by the act of not-doing they are, paradoxically, supporting their statements. ‘Jérôme Bel’ just stands there, which is a double comment on his own work and his systematic refusal to produce choreography as a series of virtuosic movements that flow. On the one hand, Bel is ridiculing his own strategies of producing dance by not producing dance, on the other hand, he is affirming them – standing still on stage as an action just as valid as is performing a fragment from Susanne Linke’s piece *Wandlung*. ‘Hamlet’ is also indicated by not-doing, which metaphorically fits with some academic interpretations of Hamlet’s character whose ‘feeling of nothingness will not leave him’. In the case of Hamlet though, there is hardly enough context for him to be able to successfully not-do: a plot is missing, a narrative that would enable him to be convincing in his role. The only words he uses – ‘To be or not to be, that is the question’ – one of the most famous quotations in literature and arguably the best-remembered line from the play – signals nothing but the very question of existence, the tension between existence and non-existence. All of these presentations of identity exist in the neutral (unspecified) space of a bare theatre stage. Once again there is a plain black stage with nothing but a microphone so that the performers don’t even have to raise their voice to reach the last row of the audience. There is no background, no context to support (or negate) their statements: no other characters from appropriate theatrical universes that could provide some legitimacy, no plot, or anything like a stage set. Because of the lack of support that the elements in this particular system (the performance of *The Last Performance*) offer to each other, the mind of the observer slips from the enclosed, autonomous system of the theatrical machine into thinking about the correspondence of the performers statements with the world of the external

68 The disturbance of this distinction between on and off, absence and presence is a way of activating the idea of the neutral.

‘transcendent’ realities that exists outside of the black box. We cannot help asking if the body on stage saying ‘Je suis Jérôme Bel’ is the legal carrier of the name Jérôme Bel. Thus the external world is sucked into the performance, not as a metaphor, not through its representation, but through its resistance to representation. Once that happens, we are trapped in a liminal space, a space in-between the theatre machine and the world outside of the stage, incapable of inhabiting either, while placing them in opposition to each other. And in this space between the two we are offered the layering of existences. The announcement of identity in the case of Andre Agassi and Hamlet is obviously false, not even seeming real (regardless of the relationship with real life, both of these representations are false as representations, because they refuse any effort to convincingly represent). By implication it reflects on two other characters and their statements, bringing them also into question. Thus the ‘convincing’ representation (‘Jérôme Bel’ doing nothing as Jérôme Bel, Claire Haenni virtuously dancing Susanne Linke’s piece) reads as false as well. However, there is a segmentation in the levels of truth/falseness: three characters are people who exist as legally recognized individuals, one is a fictional character. The ladder of truth could be read as follows: Sequette as Bel is, paradoxically, the most convincing in his representation of Bel because he does nothing except letting time go by, Haenni is very convincing in her virtuosity as a dancer, Agassi and Hamlet are both unconvincing – Agassi partially because he plays tennis badly and Hamlet because he does too little even to display his ‘paralysis of doing’. Those levels are however, not at all fixed or clear: they wiggle as we try to pin them down – ‘Hamlet’ might not be convincing as a ‘Hamlet’, but on the other hand, he is on stage, where he belongs, whereas the chances of Agassi appearing (as a character) on stage (or even in the theatre building) are more than slim. What is staged seems not to be the radical split between being and representing, that would be stabilized in its difference, but rather the interplay of both, each shown to be neither fixed nor stable. And this layering is, paradoxically, accomplished through the act of forcing representation: through the authoritative: ‘I am…’. Nothing could be less convincing in theatre than an ‘I am’ because of its very

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70 For the discussion on the relationship between the liminal and the neutral see pp. 227-228.
71 Even though one is a fictional character and the other one is a real person they are equally unconvincing in their presentations.
directness. All of these ‘characterizations’, incommensurable with each other (what does Andre Agassi have to do with Hamlet or either of them with Susanne Linke?) offer both a rejection of existing models of depth of character and any attempt at connecting the characters on an imaginary plane of cohesion. It is almost as if one falls through the extremely porous image of Hamlet or Linke or Agassi in the performance to the ‘concept’ or ‘idea’ of the representation of identity. It is almost as if the performance is saying: only when all the accidentalities of identity are minimised, excluded, irrelevant and disregarded, one can pose the question of identity.

The next sequence begins with Bel dressed as Sequette dressed as Bel saying ‘Je ne suis pas Jérôme Bel’; Haenni dressed as Bel dressed as Agassi saying ‘I am not André Agassi’; Seguette dressed as Carallo dressed as Hamlet with the phrase ‘I am not Hamlet’ and then adding ‘I am Calvin Klein’ followed by the naming of Klein’s perfumes: Obsession, Escape (after saying that he ‘escapes’ the stage) and Contradiction; Carallo dressed as Haenni dressed as Susanne Linke saying ‘Ich bin nicht Susanne Linke’. Haenni then appears dressed as Andre Agassi saying ‘Ich bin nicht Susanne Linke.’; Sequette emerges dressed as Haenni dressed as Susanne Linke saying ‘Ich bin nicht Susanne Linke’ and then dances the whole sequence from Wandlung behind the black curtain held by Haenni and Carallo, so that we can only occasionally see his feet sticking out, performing the movement. Bel comes out dressed as Susanne Linke saying ‘Ich bin nicht Susanne Linke’, placing headphones in his ears and murmuring Schubert. Then Carallo re-emerges again dressed as Sequette dressed as Bel holding a tennis racket. He tosses the ball against the wall but does not run after it. Then he tosses the racket against the wall, collects the balls that fell around and leaves the stage. On his way back, he sprays the audience with Calvin Klein perfume, takes off his jacket and uses it to disperse the perfume towards the audience. A black screen is then carried onto the stage (looking as if it’s moving of its own accord), and placed in front of the microphone. On its way out, the screen shows us its other side and we see that it has been carried on by Carallo. The piece finishes with Carallo reading aloud the surnames of the people in the audience.
The piece negates the identities that have barely been established, or rather, which have enabled a meditation on the questions of truth and falsity. This is different to Magritte’s famous painting *The Treachery of Images* (1928-29). Here, a realistically portrayed pipe is positioned with the note ‘Ceci n'est pas une pipe’ and the tension exists between the full force of a pictorial illusionary effect and a verbal negation of the same. In the case of *The Last Performance* the negation of these identities almost seems redundant. What could be the point of negating something which hasn’t even been established? Perhaps what we are looking for is a gesture of the paradoxical establishment of a non-state, an aggressive erasure of a barely drawn image, which teases us towards a state even further from a zero state of existence - to a minus state. A descent. There is always even *less* to be done, as if the sketchiness of existence is there to point to the depth and perspective of non-existence. It is as if the performance is gesturing in the direction of non-being, non-being not simply being a negation of being, which of course destroys itself as a non-being. The constant tossing between a yes and a no has a two-fold function: on the one hand it prevents us from settling firmly and permanently into either affirmation or a negation (of an identity, of existence), while on the other hand it forces us to think the bare question of existence and the very relation between existence and non-existence, far away from accidentalities of appearances. The placement of a segment of choreography which gets endlessly repeated and performed - sometimes exposed, sometimes behind the screen - reveals the particularities of the physicalities of the dancers. The revelation of the difference in different interpretations of the same piece serves to expose the sameness of the system (it is the same piece), constructing movement and motion almost as an answer to the ontological question. The movement, the repetition and the difference which is born out of repetition are placed into the centre of the question of existence and its particularities. Accidentalities are revealed as *all there is* and thus the only ways of thinking existence. The longing to be saved from the pettiness of the theatre machine by minimizing all its heavy artillery i.e. its difference (characters, props, stage set, narration etc.), reveals the difference and the accidental in the core of the theatre machine itself. There is nothing to see but the difference and difference can never be difference itself, but always the difference of appearances. A black curtain has to be carried by a performer, it cannot walk around by itself. That is why the image of Calvin Klein,
a creator of appearances, of temporalities, is presented as a smell which
disappears into thin air close to the end of this performance. As such, it is as
appropriate a metaphor as Hamlet for an existential question. This is also the
reason why the end of the performance disperses into the audience, as the many
names of audience members are spoken into the microphone by Jérôme Bel. For
as Agamben said ‘It is often said that philosophers are concerned with essence,
that, confronted with a thing, they ask “What is it?” But this is not exact.
Philosophers are above all concerned with existence, with the mode [or rather, the
modes] of existence. If they consider essence, it is to exhaust it in existence, to
make it exist’.\footnote{Giorgio Agamben, \textit{Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy}, ed. and trans. by Daniel
Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 179.}

What we have to go back to is that the performance itself isn’t performed any
more (unlike most of Bel’s work) and can now only be ‘seen’ and experienced
indirectly, in its afterlife, as a part of the lecture, performed by Jérôme Bel. What
is attempted in this gesture is yet another attempt at fooling the theatrical
machine, yet another bracketing of the theatre experience, which returns in its full
presence in the shape of a combination - pink and orange T-shirt – endorsed by
Christian Lacroix and an obviously performed lecture that stands in opposition to
the degree zero of \textit{The Last Performance}.

\section*{1.12 Conclusion}

It is firstly important to acknowledge that Bel works from the givens of the frames
and spaces of dance theatre. He is interested in the conventions and dynamics of
the highly codified and established ‘machines’ of dance and theatre, in the
question of how they operate and how they construct an artwork and an artist. His
interests include all the relationships between the conventional agents that
construct what we understand as mainstream dance and theatre: the technical and
intellectual contents of the work itself; the artist(s) and performer(s); general and
informed audiences (theoreticians/critics/academics); programmer(s), producer(s)
and, curator(s). Bel plays with the conventions of dance and theatre to reveal both
their operations and their blind spot(s). This is his first point of interest. The work

\footnote{Giorgio Agamben, \textit{Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy}, ed. and trans. by Daniel
Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 179.}
posits itself in a dialogical frame, emphasizing its discursive constructedness on every level. He refrains from production as an active creation of difference and of originality and explores production as re-contextualization of what is already in existence and therefore known. This is his second point of interest. He creates a structure which is inherently dialogical, and not simply as a supporting mechanism or framework for a theme. Bel’s work is engaged with proposing a signification strategy that would be constantly in motion – a tremulous, shaking, unfixed signification travelling between oppositions. It knowingly attempts to place itself as fluid rather than fixed. As such, this strategy separates him out from those choreographers in the 1990s whose work is still informed by predominantly formalist approaches to movement as movement, the construction of coherent bodies, the use and production of particular moves and dance steps. He is anticipating a post-humanist means of framing movement and what movement involves; a means no longer predicated on the movement of human bodies in space, but incorporating other non-body based forms of movement – the movements of thought, or of systems for example. The importance of this strategy lies in not accepting movement as a given, familiar, unproblematic term (movement of a virtuosic body) but rather in the dynamic relationship between language and its outsides (voice/sound), meaning and its outsides (unqualified life), signification and its zero degree (the neutral). It is not given that a thing is what it is; it is always experienced in relation with its potentiality. The other thing such a strategy resists is the re-enactment of the ideology of the ‘open work’ of the 1960s, for it shows an awareness of the constructedness of every meaning and of the ‘necessity’ which governs every work of art. This impossibility of existing outside language enables Bel’s work, which gravitates around the tension with and within representation (to represent and not to represent), the tension in the signification mechanism (to signify and not to signify) and not in the ‘free’ movement of open forms constructed by the audience. In fact, an audience (or rather, an uninformed audience) is sometimes, especially in the early works that I am examining here, left out of the theatrical mechanisms that Bel is exploring. That has to do with the fact that Bel’s work deals with the production of

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73 The neutral is structurally always dialogical.
74 For a discussion of ‘post-humanist choreography’ see Rudi Laermans “Dance in General” or Choreographing the Public, Making Assemblages, Performance Research, 13.1 (June 2008), 7-14.
75 The fluidity of the signification strategy is not the same as its openness.
discourses rather than with the production of dance in its virtuosic particularity. At the same time, Bel is able to play tricks with an informed audience as well, because the knowledge that they bring into the piece is almost useless as it cannot serve to decode the operations of the piece. Bel’s work constantly shows us, in Simone Weil’s words that ‘the passage to the transcendent is opened when the human faculties - intellect, will, human love - run into a limit, and then the human being stays on this threshold, beyond which it cannot take a single step - and this without turning away, without knowing what it desires, concentrated only on waiting. It is a state of extreme humility’.

And yet, the ‘entrepreneurial’ approach that Bel advocates in selling himself as a brand is also supported by and lies in the core of the contradictions of the neoliberal system, and not just in contradictions of the general human condition. Louise Owen, in her 2009 doctoral thesis entitled ‘Performing “risk”: Neoliberalization and Contemporary Performance’, investigated precisely this image of the artist as entrepreneur, an exemplary figure of the neoliberal market. Owen shows how artistic capital is not only social capital but also economic capital because the artist embodies the figure of the ‘entrepreneur’; bold and risky, s/he is the one who ‘dares’. Bel’s questioning of the artistic market, of the dance performance as a fixed virtuosic ability functions alongside the capacity of Bel the artist to turn everything into an art object, an artist-god who creates by naming, giving it ‘added value’, turning even the act of questioning the mechanics of the functioning of an art object into an art object. Paradoxically, the two years that he lived on the money he earned working for the Olympic Games, also provided him with ‘the guarantees which can be the basis of self-assurance, audacity and indifference to profit – dispositions which, together with the flair associated with possession of a large social capital and the corresponding familiarity with the field; i.e. the art of sensing the new hierarchies and the new

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structures of the chances of profit, point towards […] the riskiest investments, which are also the most profitable symbolically. 78

There are numerous ways in which Bel shakes up the position of the (individual) artist and opens up the space for Thomas Lehmen’s interest in the way social systems operate. He thoroughly questions the authorial position, mechanisms of signification and their potential for neutralization. His work offers an inherently paradoxical structure that points to the basic mechanism of the operation of the neutral: the baffling of opposites. Whilst Bel’s neutrality is that achieved by unresolved and unresolvable signification paradoxes, Lehmen’s neutrality, as I go on to indicate in Chapter 2, will deal with the rearrangement of the idea of the individual vs. the society and with different ways of perceiving social structures.

CHAPTER 2

Thomas Lehmen’s Choreography of Singularities

2.1 Transformation of the self through dance

In Dance Studies one frequently comes across the idea that the difference between dance and the other arts is that dance ‘when done for its own sake and not merely as a job or an exercise, tends to draw its significance from the fact that in it the dancer’s self is transformed’.¹ Francis Sparshott, the author of the quote offered in the previous sentence, claims further that ‘dance is pervasive and intrinsic to our human way of being in a way that other arts are not’ and that ‘Dance is a practice marked by the thoroughness with which it involves the dancer, and by the consequent completeness of the self-transformations that it involves and that underlie the significance it may have’.² Dance performance, much more than being simply inspired by the dancer’s self becomes the process of the embodied transformation of that self.

Choreographers, dancers, dance critics and theorists of modern dance (from the beginning of the 20th century up to 1950s), in their attempt to articulate how modern dance differs from the formalism and sterility of traditional ballet, argued for the idea of self-transformation and placed an emphasis on the artistic expression of the individual performer that questions a single approach to technique. Ruth St. Denis, Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller for example were aiming ‘to liberate the body in reverence to the freedom of the individual spirit’.³

The act of taking off corsets, putting on bloomers and performing barefoot in ways that allowed more freedom of the legs and torso was at the same time

² Ibid., pp. 6, 60.
understood as the act of affirmation of the individual against social restrictions. Julia L. Foulkes argues that ‘[…] modern dance freed young women psychically from the remnants of their strict upbringing as well as physically from the residue of Victorian notions of women’s body weaknesses’. Less restricted and codified movement, enabled also by the change in clothing that allowed more physical freedom, was an expression of the liberation of the individual spirit from the solidified cultural framing of the gendered female as fragile, ethereal and vulnerable. Weakness of the body was closely tied with weakness of the spirit, and modern dance seemed like an ideal discipline to attain, or re-gain, the physical and psychological confidence that women strapped in corsets, diagnosed with hysteria, lacked. Ballet’s focus on keeping the spine upright and immobile, concentrating on legs and feet which supported the construction of feminine as ethereal, was challenged by modern dance’s centring of the body, ‘allowing the movement to flow out from the chest through the arms and legs […] to start each movement from the center – the seat of heart and lungs – and soul’. Modern dance training was nevertheless rather rigorous and relied on the development of various techniques. However, those techniques served a clear purpose, as Martha Graham said, ‘to train the body as to make possible any demand made upon it by that inner self which has the vision of what needs to be said’. The inner self, armed with a vision, was saying ‘what needs to be said’. Dance, self and destiny seemed closely entwined.

The idea that the dancer ‘can only express that which passes through or close to his experience’ is another way of affirming the importance of the individual and her or his personal experience. Individual, ‘authentic’ experience was regarded as

7 Usually, each choreographer and dancer who founded a school promoted her/his own technique. Dance techniques which outlived that period (and their initiators) and are still taught in various versions today are: Graham, Horton, Laban, Humphrey/Limón and Alexander.
almost opposite to the creation of concepts or intellectual pursuits, as Doris Humphrey elucidates in the following statement: ‘There is only one thing to dance about: the meaning of one’s personal experience and this experience must be taken in its literal sense as action, and not as intellectual conception’. The insistence on the self of the dancer/choreographer manifests itself also in the perceived link between dance and emotions, as well as that between emotions and the person: the idea that ‘the movement […] is a clue to the feelings of the person possessed by the emotional state’. The first dance critic of the New York Times John Martin, observed that, ‘at the root of all these varied manifestations of dancing […] lies the common impulse to resort to movement to externalize states which we cannot externalize by rational means’. Sally Banes summarizes it as follows ‘[…] the modern dance was predicated […] heavily on personal, often intimate, formats, on subjective content, and on individual quests for movement styles […]’.

While modern dance has been establishing itself together with the affirmation of the self of the (female) dancer, an idea that starts to slowly but intensely penetrate literature, visual arts and philosophy is that of a fragmented self. In literature, the shift from the omniscient narrator (the dominant narrative voice of realism) to the subjective narrator is followed by the fragmentation of coherent narrative lines, the introduction of stream of consciousness techniques and multiple perspectives that characterise the modernist fiction of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner (amongst many others). In the visual arts there is an exchange of the static self for a self in motion, simultaneously showing multiple view points, as in, for instance, *Nude descendant un escalier* (Nude descending the staircase) (1912) by Marcel Duchamp, *Portrait of a Woman* by Pablo Picasso (1910) or a four-eyed *Marquise Casati* by Man Ray (1922). There is also an exchange of a figurative, representative self for a collaged, cut and pasted self as in *Self-Portrait Assemblage* (1916) by Man Ray.

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However broken and shattered the modernist self might have proved in that period, the idea of self-expression is still present in dance practice, from the beginnings of modern dance to the present day.

2.2 Abstract movement

As a contrast to the idea of self-expression in dance, nevertheless, there is an almost equally strong interest in the abstraction of movement, present in the work of Merce Cunningham, whose choreographic interests were shaped during his collaboration with the greater circle of artists between 1948 and 1952 at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. One of his first works, *Root of an Unfocus* (1944) still dealt with self-expression to an extent. This is evident in his description of it: ‘The dance was, in a way, about expression. It was about fear – one of the predominant things in my life’. Yet already in *Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three* (1951), chance operations start being more important, as does the removal from the persona. ‘There were two chance operations in it. The idea of the dance comes from the Indian classical theatre of the permanent emotions. Four light, and four dark, and tranquillity, which should pervade it all. […] It immediately makes it less personal, for me, right from the top. The idea of tranquillity’. He thus soon replaced the expression of emotions with the interest in the relationship between space, time and dance, experimentation with rhythmic structures, dance phrases and their combination, the gravity of the body and chance operations. Those procedures enabled the body to be just the body, rather than the vehicle of the personal. With Cunningham, the body and spatial arrangements become the focus. His work becomes an exercise in abstract dance, preoccupied with forms, shapes, colours and positions in space. Most of all, he is interested in questioning the centre of the stage as the centre of interest. So, drawing from Einstein’s ‘There are no fixed points in space’ he treats every point in space as equally interesting. This spatial focus, together with the combinations of movements that he developed relying on chance operations.

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14 Its key historical moment starts in the 1950s and lasts till the 1970s.
16 Ibid., p. 24.
derived from the *I-ching* renders the work completely abstract and reliant entirely on a pre-determined calculus. His work is unconcerned with the personal; the personal, rather than playing any active part in the audience’s perception of the work remains outside of it. *Torse* (1975) does contain soloist moments, and Cunningham is keen on emphasizing them

The other fact in that dance that I like very much, actually, is that if you saw the whole dance – it is fifty five minutes long when the three parts are danced one after another – you would see that each one of the ten dancers appears at some point as a soloist. You have to watch, really use your eyes, but if you see it a few times, you see that each one comes out separately at one point, some way, back or front as a soloist. And though the general feeling throughout is that the dance remains a dance of ensembles, it is very individualized as well, each dancer at one point or another has a chance to appear outside the group.19

However, the individualities of dancers’ bodies and their performance are relevant predominately as elements in a dancing machine, as moments in a bigger picture.

The history of dance thus moves between those two positions (to different degrees). One pole of exploration is the preoccupation with the body as the vehicle for the expression of the inner self, and the other sees the body of the dancer as a wheel in a mechanism, part of an ensemble production focused on relations in space and the positioning of the body within that space. The ideas of dance as self–expression were mainly articulated during the period of the

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18 He describes working with the *I Ching* in *Torse* (1975) as follows: ‘There are sixty four phrases, because that’s the number of hexagrams in the I Ching. The phrases are formed like the numbers themselves. For example, one has one part in it, two has two, three has three, up to sixty-four. But I didn’t make it as though one were one rhythmic beat, and so forth, metrically. Let us take the second phrase, it will be clearer. The counts are related to weight changes. That is, if you stand on your foot, that’s one; if you bend your knee, that’s a weight change, so that’s two. [At sixty-four, you have sixty-four weight changes. Or say, in phrase ten, for example, you have to produce ten weight changes, which means you’re on one foot or both or whatever – but you might stand on one foot for a long time and circle the arms, which is not a weight change but changes completely the structure of time for this phrase. […] That was for the sixty-four movement phrases. But then you take the space and you have a similar process. I numbered the space with sixty-four squares, eight by eight. Then I used the *I Ching* as it comes out: the hexagrams come out double most of the time, one over the other, for example, thirteen over fifteen, that means phrase thirteen along with phrase fifteen. Then I would toss to see how many people did each phrase among the men, the women or both. Gradually all the combinations would come out and I would see them more and more clearly and try them out. Most of the paperwork had to be done ahead.’ In *The Dancer and the Dance: Merce Cunningham in Conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaev* (New York, London: Marion Boyars, 1991), pp. 20-21.

19 Ibid., p. 19, Cunningham is talking about his piece *Torse* (1975).
development of modern dance, although they managed to preserve their vitality after that period too. Pina Bausch’s famous saying ‘I’m not interested in how people move, but what moves them’ can also be perceived in light of this ‘internal motivation’ of the dancer. Even today, these ideas are taken for granted in contemporary dance practices and in dance schools where the emphasis is still very much on finding a personal, distinctive, ‘original’ movement style. The focus on the body in space, on the other hand, is equally dominant in dance history and practice. Not only Cunningham, but also Alwin Nikolais, José Limón, Eric Hawkins, Alvin Ailey and Paul Taylor were all far more inclined towards the abstract. Sally Banes calls them ‘the rebellious sons of the domineering mothers (aesthetically speaking)’ because they were linking emotion and ‘early modern dance exploration of the psyche’ with the female. Nikolais and Louis formulate the emphasis on the abstract as follows: ‘We can redirect the senses to focus on motion as a basic, abstract, self-contained statement rather than on the performer’s personal emotional condition or circumstance. Motion, in this process, erases reference to the dancer’s ego or personality and redirects all sensitivity to the motional event itself.’

Using this overview of modern dance as a framework, this chapter will argue that German choreographer Thomas Lehmen is promoting an alternative approach, which nevertheless relies on both of these ideas. Lehmen is not trying to unite them in a harmonious unity but quite the contrary, he is placing them in an unresolved tension, thus effectively, in my view, neutralizing them both. Lehmen

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23 There is always a danger of over-generalization, and one should understand such explicans as a marking of tendencies, rather than an affirming of completely fixed divisions. For instance, Limón’s focus on abstract dance can also be said to have developed from his teacher’s (Doris Humphrey) interest in the notion of ‘the pure dance’. (See: José Limón, Lynn Garafola, José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir [Wesleyan University Press, 2001], pp. 29, 51).
works towards the transgression of the motive (ie what moves the dancers), however, at the same time he does not focus on the fascination with the motion. He is interested in the development of a system that can provide a prolongation of uncertainty between the motive and the motion, thus allowing for the appearance of the neutral.

2.3 What is Thomas Lehmen trying to do?

This chapter will analyse two of Lehmen’s dance performances, Schreibstück (2002) and Funktionen (2004), which problematize the idea of dance as individualized and personalized practice. They also question the relevance of the/a personalized movement style in the creation of (the) choreography. They do not, on the other hand, look for the abstraction of pure movement. I argue that Lehmen’s performances explore the idea of making choreography which is indifferent to the value of the dancer and/or choreographer’s self, but that is equally indifferent to dance as a collective practice of arranging bodies and

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25 Katrin Bettina Müller on Lehmen’s website, see http://www.thomaslehmen.de/seiten/e/05_distanzlos.htm [accessed 2 October 2010].
movements in space in the search for a ‘motional event’. The individual and personal are not being ostracized or excluded from those performances in some de-humanizing search for mechanical dance where human bodies function simply as elements in an elaborated structure. Rather the individual and the personal aspects of the dancers are neutralized as primary resources of creation, key moments of expression and, most importantly, ways of generating dance material. What replaces them is an interest in the creation and operation of a choreographic system that could transgress the particular individual bodies of the dancers, because it does not rely on them a priori, but doesn’t exclude them a posteriori either. Thomas Lehmen is engaged with developing a system for generating dance that can literally accommodate anyone/any body and enable them to perform as a dancer. This system functions simultaneously as a tool for the production of choreography and as the choreography itself.

2.4 What is Schreibstück?

In August 2002, the first version of the performance Schreibstück was presented as a part of the 'Tanz im August' festival in Berlin's Podewil. Schreibstück primarily exists in the form of a book that includes written instructions on how to make a piece called Schreibstück. The written instructions in a book Schreibstück function as a score for a dance piece entitled Schreibstück. The concept of the piece and the instructions for the choreography were formulated by Lehmen. Three groups of dancers together with a chosen choreographer (each group has their own choreographer) perform their own readings of Schreibstück from the same script. These ‘dance readings’ are then presented simultaneously on stage as one piece. The script gives directions on:

1. the space (‘ideally, the stage has a floor area of 12 m by 12 m’);27
2. time (the duration of different sequences);
3. costume (‘The only part of the costume which is the same for all the performers is a white T-shirt’, ‘all the performers wear shoes’);28

27 Thomas Lehmen, *Schreibstück* (Berlin: Thomas Lehmen, 2002), n.p.
28 Ibid., n.p.
4. sound (‘the sound consists only of the original sounds that result from the actions of the dancers’);39
5. text (‘All the texts are developed in distinct English and the dancer’s native language’);30
6. choreography (‘All the tasks and activities on stage, such as movement or language, are choreographically defined as precisely as possible’).31

The script also gives indications concerning:

7. the movements (‘The performances of the given themes are done without transitions from one action to the next’)32 and
8. interpretation and choice (‘The author of Schreibstück has no intention of defining how the themes are interpreted, danced or recited by the group. The entire idea of one version depends on the interpretation of the group’).33

The score of the performance consists of 29 ‘themes’ such as ‘Enter stage’, ‘Timekeeping’, ‘Disco’, ‘Nothing’, ‘Thinking’, ‘Waiting’ and ‘Watching’, ‘Fucking’, ‘I want’, ‘Announcement’, ‘Working’, ‘I exist’, ‘Dying’, ‘Thinking.’ These are organised into three parts. Instructions for most of the 29 ‘themes’ consist of notes on action, time, sound, space and indications on how the particular section should be performed. Indications vary in detail, from those that are relatively precise (‘In collaboration with the choreographer, every dancer develops a motif – a position of the sexual act’)34 to those which are completely open (for instance, under the theme ‘Identity Intensities’, the indication is simply ‘How to work out the theme and the results are left for the group to decide’)35 Each theme is performed for exactly 1 minute, and there is a 5 second break between the themes. One performer in each group has a stop-watch which he or she uses to indicate the start and the end of the theme. This time division enables

29 Ibid., n.p
30 Ibid., n.p.
31 Ibid., n.p.
32 Ibid., n.p.
33 Ibid., n.p.
34 Ibid., n.p.
three groups to perform the themes simultaneously, although most of the time
they are performing different themes. The themes are organised in three sections:
A, B and C. Each of the three groups performs three sections. They do it in the
same order: A, B and C, but as a canon, so that different themes overlap. After the
first group finishes with the part A, the second group comes in and starts part A at
the same time that the first group starts with part B. When the first group finishes
with part C, they leave the stage. The final part of the performance is when the
third group, alone on stage, performs part C. It functions like a fugue sequentially
introducing the same theme in different registers; each group starting at a different
time so that different moments in the choreography coincide in the different
groups.

_Schreibstück_ was either offered as a script to different choreographers or given to
them if they requested it in order to work out different interpretations and thus
present them in different countries and cities.\(^{36}\) The version I will analyse
premiered in August 2002 in Berlin. It was choreographed by Martin Nachbar (in
collaboration with the performers Sybille Müller, Lina Lindheimer and Lea
Helmstädt), Sonia Baptista (in collaboration with Sofia Gonçalves, Vania
Rovisco and Joana Trindade) and Mart Kangroo (in collaboration with Marge
Ehrenbusch, Margo Teder and Päär Päärenson).\(^ {37}\)

Lehmen’s notion of authorship clearly resonates with Bel’s games with the notion
of authorship. Lehmen calls himself the author of _Schreibstück_. However, the
question of what _Schreibstück_ is and what Lehmen is the author of remains
unresolved. _Schreibstück_ could not simply be the dance notation of a
choreography because it does not record the motion of every part of the body the
way, for instance, Labanotation\(^ {38}\) does. It defines _what the movement is about_ in

\(^{36}\) The list of choreographers and dancers who have taken part in the different versions of
_Schreibstück_ can be found on Thomas Lehmen’s website
http://www.thomaslehmen.de/zeichnungen/e/01_schreibstueck.htm [accessed on 10 March 2009].

\(^{37}\) The logistics of the production involved all three choreographers rehearsing on their own,
independent of each other. They only came together shortly before the premiere to try out the joint
version.

\(^{38}\) Labanotation is the universally applicable system that records the movement with the help of a
series of symbols. It was first published by Rudolph Laban in 1928 and it is the most widely
accepted system for dance notation. For more on Labanotation see Ann Hutchinson Guest,
general terms, but not how it looks. The script prescribes ‘nothing about the actual transposition of the score into movement’.

Because it is hard to define whether Schreibstück is a book of instructions or a performance of the book of instructions or both, the question of authorship, just as with some of Bel’s pieces, plays trick on us. It is not clear whether Lehmen is also the author of all of the performances of Schreibstück and to what extent this authorship is shared with the choreographers who decide to perform Schreibstück.

What is clear, however, is that Lehmen is pushing the boundaries of the dance field. As Genevieve Oswald, then Curator of the Dance Collection of the Performing Arts Center, New York Public Library stated in 1979 ‘The true literature of dance has been handed down from generation to generation by kinaesthetic route through professional dancers themselves.’

The dance field often fetishizes the physical presence of the choreographer for the transmission of his work. In view of that, Lehmen poses questions about the consequences for the dance field of him simply writing down a set of choreographic instructions in the shape of a book that other people can use to make a performance. Lehmen performs a separation of ‘the authorial (conceptual) from the choreographic (pragmatic) function of the maker of dances’. Let me now describe in greater detail what is happening in Schreibstück in order to explain how this separation functions.

The performance begins when the first group of three performers enters a white, unmarked space. A white dance floor and white background are the only things that define the space. The dancers start performing the theme ‘Disco’, or imitating

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41 The choreographer’s presence is often considered to be crucial for the transference of a choreography. Notation is used mainly as an additional resource, rarely as the main tool for the learning of a choreography. ‘The preservation of choreographed works […] has relied heavily on the personal transmission of dances from generation to generation – a kind of oral-and-bodily tradition.’ Ellen W. Boellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy, ‘Introduction: Movement Movements’, in Bodies of Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance, ed. by Ellen W. Boellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

the dancing of several different people in a disco. They are dressed in differently shaped white shirts, skirts or trousers in various colours and identical yellow trainers. Their costumes communicate belonging to the group (identical yellow trainers), but are also individualized (although the shirts are all white, they are differently cut, and the performers’ names are written on their shirts). Each of the performers performs three different ‘dances’, one by one, simultaneously with the others. On the one hand, the dances seem ‘individualized’, representing ways in which different people move in a disco. On the other hand, because they are rather short, and not accompanied by any other strategy of developing constructs of individuality, they rather indicate possible ‘movement’ patterns or styles which are recognizable as types of behaviour in a disco. They almost serve as means of enumerating behavioural ‘patterns’ at a disco, rather than personalized performances. One dance is softly seductive, designed to attract some sexual attention, the next is a shy dance in which a person resorts to rhythmical, small movements of the hips and feet. The third is almost an auto-parody of someone dancing. The fourth is a version of a wild, energetic dance.

The theme ‘Disco’ is followed by the theme ‘Explaining the Piece’; this basically consists of the explanation of the structure of the performance. Already at this moment, the viewer becomes aware of the structure of the performance and the system that it is trying to set up. Indeed, the explanation of the structure of the performance is placed as one of the themes of the performance. The system of the performance exists on a double level: as a system of the performance, and as a unit in that system. For the next theme ‘ Fucking’, each performer performs different sex positions. One of the performers talks about what they want (as in, what they would like to do) at the same time. In the Schreibstück book, Lehmen states that the theme ‘Fucking’ and the theme ‘I want’ are connected, meaning that these two themes can be performed together. What follows is ‘Marking the Themes’, or placing chosen movements from all of the other themes in a sequence and performing that sequence.

For the theme ‘Work’ all three dancers perform actions which are representing some sort of action: one seems to be drilling the asphalt; another one rolling something (perhaps making dough or working on a weaving machine); the third
one looks as if she is sewing. The theme ‘I exist’ consists of the explanation of the facts of existence. They are explained in dispassionate terms: existence as the existence of matter, rather than the individualized existence of a person who is speaking. The body, for example, is described as flesh and bones, consisting of atoms and molecules and made up of 80% water.

With the next sequence it is difficult to know what exactly is going on, or which theme is currently being developed. Part of the problem is that it is impossible to successfully distinguish between at least two themes in the piece: ‘Nothing’ and ‘Thinking’. In addition, the themes ‘Waiting’ and ‘Watching’ also seem to be performed in a very similar way to both ‘Nothing’ and ‘Thinking’. The impossibility of telling apart ‘nothing’ from ‘thinking’ is interesting because it opens up the idea of thinking as something which is impossible to show or impossible to represent. ‘Thinking’ on stage looks very much like ‘nothing’. The ‘representative’ proximity between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing nothing’ touches the very core of the problem of the philosophical readings of a performance. The only way to represent an idea on stage is through an action. Yet when it comes to thinking, no action can represent it, because thinking in itself doesn’t require any visible action. In order for a performance to provoke philosophical readings, it has to be ‘representatively’ minimalistic; it shouldn’t draw too much attention to its staging and its details. In other words, in order to stage ‘thinking’ in the performance, one must not do too much, because that draws attention to the material practices and away from the process of thinking itself. In addition, it is impossible to perform ‘nothing’ while the performers are on stage because they always necessarily do something, even if it is just standing, or breathing, or sitting, or lying down. It is already so much more than nothing. By representing thinking or not representing thinking, which seem to be the same (because thinking is unrepresentable), Lehmen also draws attention to the ungraspable nature of intentions. Yet the ungraspable nature of intentions is not in itself interesting because of its ungraspability, but rather because it places emphasis on interpretation and construction as means and strategies for its resolution.

After the completion of this theme (whichever one it was - ‘Thinking’, ‘Nothing’, ‘Waiting’ or ‘Watching’), the second group enters the stage and starts performing
their sequence of themes, which repeats that performed by the first group to this point. However, since the first group has moved on, and is now performing its second sequence, their themes only occasionally collide.

A lot of the pleasure of the piece lies in the cognitive game of guessing what it is that the dancers are doing at any given moment: which action are they performing? When the second group comes on stage and especially when the third one joins them, the game becomes even more complex. It is as if aesthetic pleasure is deliberately replaced by cognitive pleasure, and the performance is trying to establish its own rules of perception and evaluation. The interest in the creation of meaning of the performance seems to be replaced by the construction of a system. The performance reads like the tracking down of where a certain moment is happening in the performance, rather than what it means. Semantic decoding is replaced by syntactical analysis. The book *Schreibstück* functions almost like a map through the performance *Schreibstück*. What Lehmen seems to be doing is replacing meaning with order, organising a particular communication system, readable as a communication system, with clear rules for operation and behaviour, avoiding the representation of the content of that communication. These rules are, additionally, presented as a part of the performance: the explanation of the rules is a theme in the performance. In order for the systemic nature of communication to emerge, the identities of individual performers need to be neutralized. It almost seems that this performance refuses to engage with the world, and is dealing only with its own system as a performance. In order to elaborate further on this concept, I will introduce the idea of *autopoiesis*.

Chilean biologists Humbert Maturana and Francisco Varela introduced the term *autopoiesis* in order to describe the functioning of biological systems such as cells. Basically, the cell produces its own components, which, in turn, maintain the structure which produces them (the cell). Thus a cell is a product of its own production. In a way, what Lehmen tried to do with *Schreibstück* is to create such a system, which functions only through self-referral. It would also eliminate the creator of that system (the author, Thomas Lehmen), from its (re)production.

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The difference (between the autopoietic reproduction of the cells and the performance Schreibstück) is that Lehmen is responsible for conceiving and initiating the system, but once this has been done, the system doesn’t need Lehmen to (re)produce itself. Also, none of the versions of Schreibstück is the ‘original’ version, and none is ‘better’ than the other. There isn’t a model version of this piece, or an ‘original’. This might not sound like a radical move in traditional theatre, where play scripts function precisely as scripts or instructions for productions, which are then different, according to the versions of different directors. Yet what this piece introduces in the field of dance is that Schreibstück is a choreography based on words and language, rather than on movement phrases. In the field of dance, the choreographer, together with the dancers, is the author of the piece. The piece is usually no different than the combination of its movements. The field of dance doesn’t acknowledge conceptualization of dance outside of the particular movements that are taking place. The dance piece is also usually performed with the dancers it was conceived with. Occasionally another dancer can replace the dancer that was injured or pregnant or otherwise engaged, but the idea of having different productions of the same piece is rarely actualized.

One of the concepts related to autopoiesis it is the idea of operational closure. Assuming that this dance performance functions as a system that produces itself,

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44 The term autopoiesis has been of great importance in Erika Fischer-Lichte’s performance theories (See: The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics (Abindgon & New York: Routledge, 2008). However, she discusses autopoiesis as a feedback loop between the performance and the audience, while in this case I am interested in autopoiesis as a feedback loop between the book Schreibstück and the various performative instances of Schreibstück.

45 In general, I would not consider revivals to be exceptions to this practice. Most revivals are re-stagings of dance pieces that were once performed, rather than performances in their own right. They attempt to emphasize or draw attention to a non-existent dance archive, to stand-in or replace a dance performance as it was. Their failed attempts point to the ephemerality of dance as a discipline, but have rarely been conceptualised as performances worthy of attention in their own right. (For instance, the revival of 7 Milana Bros’s performances from 1962 to 1985 for the 20th Dance Theatre Festival in Zagreb in 2003 was a way of paying tribute to the most significant Croatian choreographer of the 1960s to 1980s. In that sense, revivals have a primarily historical function. See Iva Nerina Sibila, ‘Individualni talent kao tradicija: Kaspomanija’ in Zarez, 186/7, 7 September 2006, online version http://www.zarez.hr/186/kazaliste2.htm. [accessed 14 February 2009]. There are, however, exceptions to this dominant model and they are growing in number as the attitudes towards re-staging change. One of the exceptions is the piece by Mårten Spångberg Powered by Emotion (2004), a reconstruction of Steve Paxton’s dance improvisation Goldberg Variations (1986-92). This piece deals with complex issues such as the fact that it is actually a reconstruction of an improvisation (thus increasing its instability and reinforcing its ephemerality through the process of asking how it is possible to reconstruct an improvisation). These issues would require a separate analysis which is outside of the scope of this thesis.
it is *operationally closed*. It means that it only communicates with other dance performances, or other versions of itself. It doesn’t communicate directly with the world. Through constructing itself as a particular system, it creates rules by which it communicates with the audience. It creates rules for its own perception. This operational closure functions also in the performance: different versions of the performance, by three different groups, lie next to each other, and the only communication that happens is juxtaposition. The three different performances do not influence each other in any direct way, the three groups do not communicate, each groups acts as if it is alone on stage. And yet, the performance functions as a whole, as an integrated system. Three groups together create a fourth system equivalent to ‘harmonics’ or at least the semantic modality that the system implies. This systems closure introduces us to the concept of communication developed by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann that is of direct relevance to Lehmen’s work.

### 2.5 Luhmann’s communication that communicates

Niklas Luhmann argues that human beings are not the units of society, rather these are the events through which society organizes itself. This seems completely counterintuitive and deeply irrational. However, our perceptions of society as an assembly of individuals are produced and sustained by an education system which still very much supports those traditional descriptions of society. To perceive a society as a group of individuals is a view we have internalised as rational. Yet if we think about the way society functions, why would it be more rational to think about a trial for embezzlement as a moment in the personal history of an individual, rather than an element of a social procedure to ensure the functioning of a society according to certain laws and regulations? Society can be thought about in different terms, other than the individual/group division. One of the proofs that a different perception of individual/group relations is possible remains the notion of the individual itself that has undergone significant historical changes.

In his research, Luhmann analyses the historical development of the notion of individuality identifying social positioning as a key factor. The notion of ‘an individual’ went through a great change from the 16th to the 20th centuries.
According to Luhmann, in the 16th century individual identity was defined through positioning in the social order. At that point individuality used to refer to indivisibility, rather than to ‘uniqueness’ or ‘singularity’. An individual was not characterized by what is particular to him, the way s/he is now. Rather differently, an individual was defined through birth, rank and social position which was basically the position of his or her family. Social positioning was, in effect, that which gave a person his or her identity. However, when that model of social organisation (stratified differentiation) shifted to a new bourgeois climate in the 19th century and the hierarchical order loosened, individuality began to stand for ‘being different from everybody else’.

As Luhmann notes of the perception of individuality in the 20th century,

the individual is understood as a singular, unique world-relation that becomes conscious by its own self and that is realized as human existence. Since then it has become impossible [...] to conceive of the individual as a part of a whole, as a part of society. Whatever the individual makes of himself and however society contributes to this: it has its standpoint in itself and outside of society. The formula ‘subject’ symbolizes nothing else. Thereby the individual is external to all function systems. It can no longer participate.  

Rather than describing society on the basis of its participants (or groups of people), Luhmann is trying to affirm a different view: to approach our thinking about society in terms of events. According to this approach, events or happenings are treated as the units or elements of a society. Holding a speech at a political party meeting, engaging in an act of political communication, buying a cauliflower at a market, all of these actions can all be perceived as events that show human beings engaged in some sort of communication.

Luhmann’s point is that persons do not communicate, that it is, in fact, only systems that communicate. And if you try to communicate with someone who not only does not speak any of the languages you speak, but also doesn’t use similar gestural language to that which you are using, then the idea of systems of communication that are communicating rather than individuals themselves

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engaged in acts of communication becomes in itself rather plausible. It is not that person A and person B cannot understand each other, although this is what appears to be what we see at first, it is that their systems of communication are incommensurable. It is the systems of communication that do not communicate.

Furthermore, if it was individuals who were communicating, it would be impossible for several communication models to be happening at the same time because the result would be a split individual, or a ‘dividual’. A woman can function in her role as a mother or in her role as a university professor, without suffering from severe identity disorder, because both being a mother and being a university professor are particular communication models that operate in different situations. Human beings are needed for the communication to happen, since they are the ones pronouncing the words or performing the gestures, but they are not inside the communication: they are neither the content of that communication, nor that which communicates.

As Luhmann states:

> Within the communication system we call society, it is conventional to assume that humans can communicate. Even clever analysts have been fooled by this convention. It is relatively easy to see that this statement is false and that it only functions as a convention and only within communication. The convention is necessary because communication necessarily addresses its operations to those who are required to continue communication. Humans cannot communicate; not even their brains can communicate; not even their conscious minds can communicate. Only communication can communicate.   

Or in the words of Hans-Georg Moeller

> We can, in communication, only connect to the communication of others, but never to their minds or brains, much less to the ‘human being’ as such in any given case. While communication cannot take place without human

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beings, human beings are, paradoxically enough, still totally inaccessible within communication.48

Thinking about society in terms of systems of communication places ‘persons’ outside of the operation of social systems. ‘Words such as “human being”, “soul”, “person”, “subject”, and individual are nothing more than what they effect in communication’.49 Thinking in that direction enables me to see Lehmen’s performance not as a particular organisation of individual bodies in space, but as an organisation of the events of communication. Units in the production are no longer individual dancers, but acts of their communication organised around different ‘themes’. Lehmen is provocating a staging of pure communication avoiding the content of that communication.

Indeed, I would argue that Luhmann’s ideas provide an opportunity for a different conceptualization of the performance Schreibstück. Perceiving a society through individuals as its key elements is a particular view of perceiving a society, but not necessarily the only way of perceiving a society. The same can effectively be stated about the dancers in a performance. Luhmann’s suggestion that there could be other ways of analysing the functioning of a society or other ways of segmenting a society which do not perceive persons or individuals as relevant moments in that analysis is intriguing. What he is arguing is that individuals and their thoughts are not the key elements of the events of communication. In other words, communication happens regardless of the assertion of someone’s individuality, through established communication systems. It is a shift in perception, neutralization of the individual and personhood, rather than its complete denial. If we think about Cunningham’s pieces now and the way that he organised movements in space (and link it with Luhmann’s perception of an event of communication, rather than an individual as a unit of the social order) then we can see that what Lehmen is doing is turning acts of communication into abstract entities, unattached to any particular context. What he is doing is choreographing acts of communication rather than movements and bodies. That is why


movements in themselves can be performed in any way (as long as its not so expressive so as to focus all the attention on to itself and therefore prevent the abstraction of the system in place). Movements themselves are not that which is being choreographed here.

Perceiving dancers on stage as individuals can be a trap that prevents the audience from perceiving the operation of communication systems that is taking place. When we watch a dance piece what we are used to watching is bodies that move. However what we are watching here is the dancing of the acts of communication. This does not mean that an ‘individual’ as an idea is entirely irrelevant: human bodies and minds are still individual, unique and singular. Individuality or personhood is simply not an essential element of the dance performance Schreibtück, it is subdued. The individuality of the dancers is neutralized in the performance Schreibtück in order for the systemic communication to come forward. There isn’t a need to purge the dancer from the dance, in order for the dance performance to appear as a representation of the systemness (my term) of a (social) system. The perspective that Luhman opens up with his analysis of communication will be also useful in my readings of the BADco. performance Deleted Messages (2004) in the fourth chapter, where the operation of the social system is the production’s main mechanism.

2.6 A Life

What emerges in Thomas Lehmen’s choreography, when we think about it in relation to Luhmann’s ideas, is that the dancers in the performance are literally replaceable, as are the particular movements that they use. When they are performing, it is compelling to watch them, not only because they are taking part in a dance system, but also because the movements they are performing are characteristic for and of them. Nobody else, in different versions of Schreibtück, will undertake the movements in the same way. Yet at the same time, for the performance to work, there could be a number of other individuals and a number of other ways of performing movements. How can we combine these two opposite ideas? How can the dancers be replaceable and yet at the same time present movements that are important in their particularity?
Lehmen is not neutralising the personal and fixing it into its opposite, the impersonal. I argue that Lehmen is dealing with the concept that emerged out of the fading of both the idea of the personal and that of the impersonal. Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Dickens’ last novel Our Mutual Friend might be a way of approaching this idea of neutralization. One of the characters in the novel is the unscrupulous villain Roger ‘Rogue’ Riderhood. He is far from being respected in the community: ‘No one has the least regard for the man; with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion’.50 However, while he is fighting for his life after nearly drowning, the people witnessing this struggle develop a feeling of deep empathy for him. ‘Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily’.51 They don’t feel empathy for too long, the moment he starts to recover any warm feelings they have developed for him disappear. ‘As he grows warm, the doctor and the four men cool.’ They remember him the way he is when he is alive, with all the details of his unloved and possibly unloveable persona. ‘The spark of life was deeply interesting while it was in abeyance, but now that it has got established in Mr Riderhood, there appears to be a general desire that circumstances had admitted of its being developed in anybody else, rather than that gentleman’.52

Riderhood is defined by a particular life path. He is of a certain appearance and character. Being what he is, he might provoke more or less sympathy (less in this case), this or that emotions (mostly negative feelings), depending on the particular circumstances of his life (difficult) and the situations in which he enters any sort of relations with other people (based on fraud and deceit). These circumstances and these relations individualize him while he is alive and breathing. Yet at the moment when life starts to ‘leave’ him, life itself is the only thing the others see in him. It is not this or that life, i.e. the particular personality of Mr Riderhood; neither is it, however, some general unspecific life as a concept with which one couldn’t sympathise either. It is only this real body, this individual body, precisely

51 Ibid., p. 32.
52 Ibid., pp. 34, 35.
the body of Mr. Riderhood (who still is Mr. Riderhood) that can make us think of ‘the life itself’, in the moment when it is fading away.

Deleuze describes it as follows:

Between his life and his death, there is a moment that is only that of a life [my underlining, Deleuze’s italics] playing with death. The life of the individual gives way to an impersonal and yet singular life that releases a pure event freed from the accidents of internal and external life, that is, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a ‘Homo tantum’ with whom everyone empathises and who attains a sort of beatitude. It is a haecceity no longer of individuation but of singularization: a life of pure immanence, neutral, beyond good and evil, for it was only the subject that incarnated it in the midst of things that made it good or bad. The life of such individuality fades away in favour of the singular life immanent to a man who no longer has a name, though he can be mistaken for no other. 53

Haecceity (from the Latin *haecceitas*, which means ‘thisness’) refers to aspects of a thing which make it specific, which make it a particular thing. Its opposite term is quiddity, which refers to the universal qualities of a thing, those aspects that the thing may share with other things. 54 The haecceity of Mr. Riderhood are those qualities which make him Mr. Riderhood and no one else, while quiddity refers to him being a human being. Yet in this case, Mr. Riderhood’s haecceity is no longer his individuality, it becomes his singularity. Deleuze is talking here about a life, which exists as a notion in the tension between haecceity and quiddity. The singularity Deleuze is talking about is neither Mr. Riderhood nor any man, but is also neither not Mr. Riderhood nor is it not any man.

Although he is not forcing his dancers into a near death experience, Lehmen manages to achieve a similar effect, because, according to Deleuze, ‘…we shouldn’t enclose [a] life in the single moment when individual life confronts universal death’. 55 Thus it is not only those moments between life and death that can induce the category of a singularity. When Dickens writes about Riderhood:

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54 Haecceity and quiddity are terms from medieval philosophy first coined by Duns Scotus. See, for instance, Paul Vincent Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1994).
‘In sooth it is Riderhood and no other, or it is the outer husk and shell of Riderhood and no other, that is borne into Miss Abbey’s first-floor bedroom, [my italics and underlining], this is what Lehmen achieves with his dancers. He manages to make them appear as ‘outer husks and shells of no one other, but themselves’. The system that he has set up draws attention to itself, to its own mechanics, further away from the idiosyncrasies of personal performance. Yet the performance of each of the dancers is personalized, not just because it is dependent on the bodies of the dancers, their skill and training, but because Lehmen leaves it only loosely defined in what it is, enabling and also urging them to individualize the movements. Although various actions in the performance are prescribed and so is, to an extent, the manner in which it is done (as a set of instructions, printed in a book), the movement itself is not set. The movement itself belongs to a particular performance, a particular version of Schreibstuck, and to a particular dancer in that performance. ‘The indefinite article is the indetermination of the person only because it is the determination of the singular.’ Thus, in Lehmen’s performance ‘It is not I or you who lives: ‘one’ (une vie) lives in us’.

Deleuze finds another example of a singularity: in very small children.

It even seems that a singular life might do without any individuality, without any other concomitant that individualizes it. For example, very small children all resemble one another and have hardly any individuality, but they have singularities: a smile, a gesture, a funny face – not subjective qualities.

These gestures, singularities, are another way of describing what Lehmen’s performers are doing. Performing an action, telling a story, dancing in a disco, describing what their bodies are made of – these are all examples of how the dancers exist in this performance. Their individualities, their personhood is not fragmented, disintegrating or split as in a Sarah Kane or Heiner Müller play, for

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instance. They are more neutralized, existing in tension with the idea of a group, a society, a genus in order to produce another term, that of a life, a *singularity*.

In order to elaborate more on this concept of singularity, it is important to note that Lehmen’s instructions - the structure that he has set up - are very important. If he had set up a model of complete improvisation instead, that would disable the process of the neutralization of the individual as it would particularize each performance and make it entirely unique in itself. Quite differently in Lehmen’s production, the freedom to define the movement exists between the script and the actual performance, not in the actual performance itself. In the performance, everything is pre-determined.

### 2.7 Funktionen

In order to elaborate this thought further, I will look into another of Lehmen’s performances, *Funktionen* (2004). *Funktionen* is also the name of a tool-box, a small cardboard grey box containing a notebook describing its content and several sets of cards. The tool-box reminded me of children’s toys such as a medical kit, a sewing kit or science kit. The difference is that this tool-box contains mainly ‘ideas’ rather than ‘objects’ for generating choreography. The cards themselves can be thought of as *Lego* elements, meaning that they can be (and are meant to be) placed in relation with others and combined with each other in different ways. The comparison with *Lego* stops there, because while Lego remains fixed in what it is, and doesn’t change as a unit when attached to another piece of Lego, the cards in a combination influence each other and merge with each other. Let me first describe what types of cards exist before I start explaining their possible combinations.

Three sets of cards contain three different choreographic systems: ‘Categories’, ‘It’s better to…’ and ‘Functions’. The set ‘Categories’ is divided into subcategories: ‘Space’, ‘Relation’, ‘Movement’, ‘Time’, ‘Quality’, ‘Image’ and an unnamed subcategory. Under ‘Space’ one can find cards with the following instructions ‘near the audience’, ‘lower than one meter’, ‘where you would make love’ and several blank cards (each set contains several blank cards). The subset ‘Relation’ contains the instructions: ‘in couples’, ‘looking at each other’, ‘follow

The second set ‘It’s better to...’ contains cards entitled ‘start’, ‘demonstrate your favourite sexual position with someone else’, ‘remember your PIN code’, ‘create a piece of art with one arm and one leg’, ‘create a dance movement that you have never done before and repeat it’ and a number of blank cards.


- art, autopoiesis, category, circular closed, code, communication, complexity, component, conflict, context, contingency/double contingency, cybernetics, dance, difference, differentiation, disturbance, element, emergence, entropy,
environment, evolution, exclusion, factor, form, function, identity, image, improbability, inclusion, information, interdependence, interpretation, manipulation, material, meaning, mediation, medium, monad, monocentric, movement, notification, observation, parameter, performance, polycentric, presence, problem, process, quality, reduction of complexity, reality, reflection, relation, selection, self-organisation, self-production, self-referentiality, sense, society, space, structure, subsystem, system (a), system (b), teleology, theme, time, transformation, transposition, understanding, unit and universality.

The basis for a lot of definitions, and the criteria for selection of the terms to be defined could be traced back (implicitly or explicitly) to the work of Niklas Luhmann. For instance, Lehmen’s definition of a code reads as follows:

A code is a way to distinguish elements of a system from elements that do not belong to the system. A code is a basic ‘language’ of a functional system. Codes are, for example, truth (versus non-truth) for the science system, legal (versus illegal) for the legal system, or fitting (versus not fitting) for the art system. Every communication using a particular code is a part of the system whose code reference is being used. A code is used to limit the kind of permissible communication. Every communication that doesn’t use a code is not a communication belonging to the system under consideration. In Luhmann’s systems theory, no system uses and understands the code of another system. There is no way to translate the code of one system into the code of another system. For example, an economic system will ‘see’ a scientific system only in terms of what makes money or requires investments.60

The definition of art doesn’t mention Luhmann explicitly yet it agrees very much with Luhmann’s understanding of art as a social system:

A medium of communication. Art serves to increase the probability of the improbable and allows particular objects to be observed with the help of differentiations exclusively located in and by the artwork itself. Art strives to re-activate possibilities which are already out of the question. Art is related to each possibility that, following the realization of particular things, has been reduced to the state of being nothing more than possible, a mere possibility, and it attempts to show how a self-necessitated system of

60 Cards in the box are not numbered, so I can’t provide references. They are sorted in alphabetical order with each card containing one definition.
the order of things is possible. The function of art is to offer the world the opportunity to observe itself by means of exclusive possibilities.\textsuperscript{61}

The tool-box allows a lot of freedom in its usage: it already contains many blank cards which allow ‘authors’ in the wider sense of the word to add their own ideas, but it can also be used as an inspiration for an entirely different set of categories and a different system altogether. The tool-box can serve many purposes. Not only can it function in the production of a piece of art but it can also be used as a teaching material. Although defined initially in relation to dancers, the tool-box can also be used in different contexts, as in music and the fine arts.

I have chosen the example of Funktionen to show what singularities aren’t. Although rather similar to Schreibstück, it doesn’t produce the same neutralizing effect. It is precisely this openness of the system in Funktionen, its indeterminacy (the fact that there are so many blank notes, that the system doesn’t require us to use it as it was designed but can be used as inspiration for other systems) which somehow re-establishes the split and the difference between an individual and a group, the personal and the abstract. However, if in the performance the field and the structure are set in advance (with each choreographer who uses this tool box) an opportunity for the emergence of singularities arises again.

\textbf{2.8 Conclusion}

Although it would be too crude to strictly separate all the ideas underlying dance and choreography into two oppositional groups, there is a tendency to locate dance somewhere on the spectrum between the idea of self-expression and the search for a ‘motional event’, an original and sophisticated way of moving (and they also often exist not contradicting each other). If, however, we want to look at what else dance as an art form is capable of doing, what emerges in the work of Thomas Lehmen is a particular state that keeps these two ideas in a dialectical tension. Lehmen is neither interested in the self-expression or authentic movement that would somehow communicate the soul or essence of the dancer and choreographer, nor is he attempting to focus on the experimentation with the forms of the movement. His question is not ‘What moves the dancers?’ nor ‘How

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
else can the human body move?’ but rather ‘What kind of identity or entity are we watching when we are watching dancers performing a dance performance?’ And the answer he is offering is that we are neither watching a personal, individual entity/identity of a dancer, nor a general, abstract identity of a form or a way of moving, although we are holding to both of these entities/identities as ideas when we watch a dance performance. When we are watching the dancers in Schreibstück, we are looking at singularities, notions neutral in their structures (in the way they are constructed), ideas that cannot be merged together into one unified idea but keep existing in a tension with each other. We observe neither a face of a particular person nor a symbol of a particular type, but the moment in between, that is constantly moving and fluid, slipping through our fingers when we try to grasp it more firmly: a life.

From Bel’s interrogation of the modes of (individual) authorial and performative existence as a sign structure, with Lehmen we have arrived at a point where the very opposition between the individual and the general or the system is questioned. Firstly, via Luhmann, the very way of perceiving a social system by perceiving individuals as its units is problematized. Then, with the help of Deleuze, an attempt to articulate a new mode of being and perceiving, where both the individual and the general are being neutralized is placed in focus. Whilst Bel’s question would be: what is the place of the neutral in the operation of signs?, Lehmen’s question would be: what is the place of the neutral in the social system or, the appearance of what does the neutral (attitude) enable in the social system? Lehmen’s question will be taken up by BADco. and resolved in a slightly different way in the fourth chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Raimund Hoghe: On sentimental neutrality

3.1. Introduction
This chapter will describe and conceptualize the poetics of the German choreographer Raimund Hoghe with regards to his production of affects as the main strategy for the generation of meaning in his performances. In short, and as a preview of the argument to follow, Hoghe’s non-standard body, placed at the dramaturgical centre¹ of his productions, induces a sentimental reaction: Hoghe’s productions, and his deployment of his scenic persona, attempt to produce affect as sentiment (a dispositional [potential] state, a state of lesser intensity, which lingers on even when one is not experiencing it in the moment) rather than as emotion (an occurrent [actual] state, a relatively short and intense state).² He attempts to ‘get under our skin’ as a way of opening a psychological and a philosophical problem with his performances, rather than simply making us ‘like’ him or ‘dislike’ him as a performer and/or a choreographer. I argue that Hoghe attempts to provoke a tender fondness for his performances and his stage persona which opens up a question of the role of sentiments in social communication - a central focus of his performance work. Hoghe is circling around one of the basic questions of psychoanalysis: whether we can ever (should we even) love others ‘for themselves’ or whether all love is essentially narcissistic. Are affects

¹ What I mean by dramaturgical centre is that most of Hoghe’s productions are organised around his physical presence on stage: his physicality is the key gravitational pull in his performances. This is not only achieved by the difference inherent to his body, but also by the dramaturgical organisation of his productions, which enable his body to take centre stage, ideologically, emotionally and physically.

² In The Subtlety of Emotions (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 80-86, Aaron Ben Ze’ev analyses the difference between emotions and sentiments, explored already by Alexander Faulkner Shand in The Foundations of Character: Being a Study of the Tendencies of the Emotions and Sentiments (London: Macmillan, 1920). Both emotions and sentiments have a specific intentional object (you love or envy someone or something), whereas the intentional object of moods, affective disorders and affective traits is diffuse and unspecific (you are shy, cheerful or gloomy). However, the main difference between emotions and sentiments is that the former are actual (dispositional), occurring at a given moment, while the latter are potential, they represent tendencies to become occurrent states of a certain kind in given circumstances. Being afraid of the earthquake happening right now is not the same thing as being afraid of earthquakes. According to Ben Ze’ev, ‘a certain person may have the sentiment of [say] love when she does not actually have the occurrent state of love, if she tends to experience it quite frequently, and when she actually experiences it, the typical feeling associated with love is present as well’ (p. 80). Emotions have a limited duration; sentiments may persist over a lifetime. In the words of James Russell Lowell, ‘Sentiment is intellectualized emotion’, quoted in Ben Ze’ev, p. 80.
legitimate means for pacifying the Otherness of the Other, means for translating difference into sameness or, to be more specific, making the difference irrelevant for the functioning of any relationship and thus, for wider social structures?

Hoghe is using ‘affects’ as a structural element in his work: as that which holds the piece together, a substance that acts cohesively. As a performer and a choreographer, Hoghe is trying to make us ‘love him’, so that we might or will understand him, but while doing that he is also exposing the essentially manipulative mechanism behind this attempt and, therefore, the essentially manipulative mechanism inherent in human relations. ‘I love you, therefore it must be that I can also understand you’ or rather ‘If I make you love me, it doesn’t matter whether you understand me.’ Hoghe is exposing the production of certain sentiments (love, empathy, compassion) as social mechanisms for neutralizing the *difference* immanent to or operating within the relationship with the Other. Through the construction of a performative persona, and through placing this persona into relations (with objects, co-performers and spectators) Hoghe’s work invites the spectator to experience a tension between an ethical relation to the Other and their emotional identification with the Other, a tension in which the Other seems to disappear leaving only the affect of this tension behind. This effect, I would argue, is a kind of a sentimental neutrality.

There is an apparent contradiction between the neutral and the affective, which this chapter will attempt to explore and perhaps even resolve. In the way they are conventionally perceived, affects are not neutral, they are intense states. At the same time, neutrality isn’t affectionate. I will argue that the neutral and the affective are not necessarily in contradiction, and that, when occurring simultaneously, they lead to a new understanding. It is precisely the process of the production of sentiments in Hoghe’s work that proposes a different take on the paradox of the Other – a positioning of the Other and the Self in a sort of a neutral tension.

Hoghe is also, amongst the four cases I am dealing with in this thesis, perhaps the least obvious choice for the discussion of the neutral. But my intention is to show how the operation of the neutral can function where least expected: in the
conceptualization of relations. Hoghe’s neutrality is entirely structural (although some appearances of the neutral are present in his minimalist stage organisation).³

3.2 ‘Please click’: the authorial persona of Raimund Hoghe
In 2008, the critics from ballet and dance magazine balletanz⁴ awarded Hoghe the ‘Dancer of the year 2008’, the prize for the best European dancer. Eleven years earlier, at the beginning of his solo career, during the Oktoberdans festival in Bergen (Norway) when he was performing Chambre Séparée at BIT-Teatergarasjen around half of the audience left the performance in protest.⁵ The ten years between these two events mark a change in the perception of what a dance performance is and can be, what the aesthetic criteria of the quality of a dance performance are, and the type of bodies that can fit with the preconceived notion of what a ‘proper’ dancer’s body looks like.⁶ It is important to emphasize that the specific engagement with the production of affects as a particular strategy for the production of meaning (that I will analyse in relation to Hoghe) is not counter-indicative of a range of affects that his productions might provoke, including complete indifference. Whether the performance actually produces this or that affect is different from the question of how it engages with the production of affects, and how it uses that production in order to illuminate the problem of engaging with the Other. In other words, whether we will feel or not feel⁷ something during the production is not entirely the same question as whether the production makes us think about certain affects, the way they are induced and what is it that they do. I will focus on the second set of questions. As a way into this subject, I will first provide a context for the perception of Hoghe’s work by

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³ For the relationship between minimalism and the neutral see pp. 44-45 of this thesis.
⁴ balletanz was started in 1994 by Erhard Friedrich und Johannes Odenthal. It is a mainstream ballet and dance magazine, published monthly in Berlin, with a wide European distribution. Most of the texts are published in German with occasional texts presented in English as well. The magazine also has a website http://www.ballet-tanz.de.
⁷ According to Ben Ze’ev in The Subtlety of Emotions, p. 48. ‘The basic characteristics of typical emotions are instability, great intensity, a partial perspective, and brevity of duration […] the basic components of emotions are cognition, evaluation, motivation and feeling.’ Feeling is a component of emotion, but emotions are cognitive states of greater complexity than feelings. Emotions also need to be distinguished from affective experiences such as moods, affective disorders and sentiments.
defining where his scenic persona comes from, how it is constructed ideologically and discursively. I am interested in Hoghe’s performative ‘persona’, in the way he presents himself and his work, and his personal narrative around it, but not in an attempt to define his ‘real’ character. It is, of course, a persona of Hoghe, whose characteristics include the impression of interiority and a biography, but we should keep this impression separate from some ‘true’ biographic reality to which we have only very limited access.

When you search for Hoghe via the Internet search engine Google\(^8\), what comes out as the first choice is his website. The first line under the site’s name and address reads ‘Please click!’, which is not so usual for a contemporary artist of Hoghe’s stature. The first line of Jérôme Bel’s website, for example, gives a short description of what the site is about and the titles of the pages or subsections: ‘Official website of RB Jérôme Bel. ... RB jérôme bel. tour schedule · other events · performances · texts interviews lectures · catalogue raisonne ...’; Thomas Lehmen’s website has the options of different languages ‘deutsch · english · français’. In fact, out of around 100 British and European theatre, dance and performance makers’ websites that I have checked, the greatest majority have some basic information on their work or who they are already in that first line that comes up on Google search. Hoghe is the only one to have a ‘Please click!’ line under the web address of his site. Whereas the characteristic discourse of the contemporary artist would be that of detachment and irony, Hoghe seems comfortable to promote a different sort of discourse: that of neediness, a lack of ‘cool’. An image that comes to mind is that of a child, asking for someone to play with him or trying to attract someone’s attention, not demanding or imploring, but begging in tone. ‘Please click.’ This ‘Please click’ is also an invitation to ‘click’, to connect with Hoghe, to relate to him, to get on with him, to be sympathetic. And this: ‘Please click.’ brings us back to the image of half of the audience leaving his performance in Bergen in 1997 and their metaphorical response: ‘We don’t want to play with you.’

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\(^8\) The Please click! note doesn’t appear if you use Bing or some other search engines.
Image 4: Screen-shot of Google search with Raimund Hoghe. [accessed 20 November 2010]

Meinwärts, Hoghe’s first recognized work from 1994, opens with a narrative account that reads as a narrative of the childhood of Hoghe’s persona:

People say he is too small for his age. Too delicate, too weak. And there is something else, barely noticeable: a slight curvature of the spine, a scarcely visible arching that makes them afraid. It becomes more and more pronounced, and there's no way of stopping it. There's not much we can do, the doctors say, prescribing massages and gymnastic exercises and an annual period of rehabilitation at the seaside. That's good for the boy's bronchial tubes, they say; it will make it easier for him to breathe. When he was younger still, his mother had once sewn him a sailor's outfit. At the cinema they watched the popular movies, movies transporting them to faraway places, down South, to the sun and the sea. The new films started on Fridays and Tuesdays. The sea was always as blue as the sky.⁹

Hoghe was born in Wuppertal after the Second World War, the illegitimate son of a widowed single mother with an elder daughter from her first marriage. He suffered the stigma of illegitimacy and a physical deformity of the back; as he was growing up, this turned into a pronounced hunchback. Life in post-war Germany, dismembered into two countries, burdened with forced labour reparations,

⁹ The text of the solo-performance Meinwärts (English version) was written in April 1994. The performance reflects upon the 1940s and is the first part of a trilogy, which includes further Chambre Séparée (1997) and Another Dream (2000). The full text can be accessed at Sarma, Belgian web portal for theatre research and dramaturgy, at http://www.sarma.be/text.asp?id=620 [accessed 4 February 2010].
horrified by Red Army rapes and subjected to hostility to all things German from the rest of Europe all added to the massive collective trauma suffered by the nation. While the perception of disability in those days was questionable almost everywhere, Germany suffered the additional burden of cultural guilt as the legacy of a racist eugenics programme implemented by the Nazi regime that promoted the ideological and physical virtues of strong, healthy, blond, Aryan body types and the elimination of those (sub) humans they identified as ‘life unworthy of life’ (*Lebensunwertes Leben*), amongst them the ‘degenerate’, ‘homosexual’, ‘insane’ and ‘weak’. In a reportage taken for TSR (Swiss TV) Hoghe argues that even today, his body is perceived differently on the street in Germany than it is anywhere else - with more shock and disgust - and he blames the Nazi regime for this. Hoghe’s account of [his] childhood in *Meinwärts* quoted above, displays a tension in the adverb ‘too’, the letter ‘o’ in ‘oo’s visually resembling open mouths of surprise, yet sounding as if they are eager to gossip, to offer pity and charity, which is uncomfortable for the person receiving it. The way they are repeated feels awkward as well: ‘too delicate, too weak’, in combination with a sinister premonition of a disaster yet-to-come: ‘a scarcely visible arching that makes them afraid.’ Problems with breathing are not just problems of localised pain; their metaphorical connotations invoke life itself, the weakness of life in Hoghe.

Strategies for coping with such hard times seem almost indiscernible from modes of escapism for the Hoghe persona. According to his accounts of his childhood, his mother liked to dance to popular romantic songs and his grandfather took him to the cinema a couple of times a week where he got caught up in a parallel world of film stars. These motifs (popular romantic songs, the destiny of film stars) reappear regularly in Hoghe’s performance work, albeit as echoes and fragments,

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11 From a video interview with Hoghe, shown as a part of a programme on society and culture called *Illico*, broadcast on 27 April 2006 on TSR [Télévision Suisse Romande] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_oH3Zm0Gkc&feature=fvser [accessed 4 February 2010].

12 This view can be partially challenged. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell emphasise the relationship between eugenics and disability as a cross-cultural problem. In *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), they argue that ‘Even among countries that were engaged with military enemies at the time, scientific and cultural agreement about the menace of ‘defectives’ transcended battlefields and diplomatic impasses as an ideological formation’, p. 104. Nevertheless, Snyder and Mitchell do fundamentally agree with the view that the devastation was wrought primarily by the Nazi regime’s medical strategy programme.
not as parts of a coherent narrative. Film stars and popular romantic songs, which were intensely woven into the fabric of his upbringing, are not accidental biographical details, but persist as a logical conclusion of an atmosphere of exclusion, of separateness and isolation. In terms of the production of meaning, in a situation of exclusion, popular songs and catchy tunes become markers of an attempt to re-possess the idea of belonging, to embody again what was disembodied at birth: attraction. There is a simple and clear logic in the overwhelming presence of popular tune and famous film stars in his work. By listening to what everyone else listens to, or by listening to that which is especially listenable, Hoghe is attempting to re-inhabit the place he was purged from: the place where majority lives, where normalness lives. His body was not particularly listenable to (in the cultural context of those times), if we are to translate, synesthetically, one sense into another, so he had to balance that out with the attention towards that which is easy on the ear (or the eye). His interest in that which is ‘popular’ is parallel with his interest in the marginal, they reflect each other, almost as two sides on an imaginary scale, providing balance.

Hoghe began his career as a writer and journalist. The varied portraits he wrote for the German weekly magazine Die Zeit were later published in several books. He talked with and wrote about people like Schlager ballad singer Rex Gildo, the singer and actor Freddy Quinn, Austrian writer Peter Handke, the actor Bruno Ganz (who, much later, played Hitler in Der Untergang [2004]), the German dancer and teacher Gret Palucca, the gospel music singer Fred Hammond, but also the hidden figures in German society: a woman who cleans toilets, a homeless person, a young person dying of AIDS, a person who can’t read or write. It is often mentioned that he wrote both about celebrities and outcasts, and in fact, even the ‘celebrities’ he wrote about have an imprint of marginality and irrelevance. They are struggling with their fleeting fame and public acclaim: most of them rose to prominence for a while (usually in relation to an event, such as Ganz’s casting as Hitler, or the Eurovision Song contest 1956 where Quinn represented Austria) only to be forgotten as soon as they managed to become ‘famous’. Some of them produce work that is aesthetically rather dubious,

especially if we think in terms of ‘high culture’s’ contempt for ‘low culture’s’ products (Rex Gildo and Freddy Quinn’s highly accessible and sentimental catchy ballads). Whereas the attraction to popular actors can be understood as an attempt to internalize some of that popularity and appeal, a soft spot for outcasts or people on the verge of fame, or, to put it differently, people who are especially prone to compassion and sympathy, is an attraction of something familiar.  

A detail caught my attention in Quinn’s biography: he is described as someone who ‘adopted the persona of the rootless wanderer who goes to sea but longs for a home, family and friends’. The image of longing for other people, their presence and support is often repeated, in various shapes and forms (physically, textually, musically) in Hoghe’s performance work.

Between 1980 and 1990, Hoghe was the dramaturge of Pina Bausch and her Tanztheater Wuppertal. Their collaboration, interestingly, began when he came to interview her for an article for Theater Heute, although Bausch’s rather permanent and enduring reputation in international dance circles and beyond, together with her high quality work, is an exception to his interest in celebrity marginality. Bausch, however, was very well suited for the role of ‘suffering artist’ while she was alive, looking painfully thin, almost on the verge of anorexia, entirely dedicated to her work whose production she described in agonizing terms: there is nothing easy or playful in Bausch’s account of her process of creation, rather the focus is on endless insecurities and stress. A year before his collaboration with Bausch ended, Hoghe started making his own work. In the

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14 It cannot be stressed enough that I am not passing any judgments or making any conclusions about Raimund Hoghe’s personality. What I am trying to engage with here is a particular sign construction around certain markers, such as his constitution and the particular conditions of his childhood. As I already said, I am curious about his performative persona and the way he uses his biography to construct it.


16 That experience also resulted in the publication of two books: Pina Bausch - Tanztheatergeschichten (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987) and Bandoneon - Für was kann Tango alles gut sein?: Texte und Fotos zu einem Stück von Pina Bausch (Darmstadt: Luchterhand Verlag, 1981).

17 Pina Bausch was certainly an important figure in the development of Hoghe’s work. However, Bausch is first and foremost an extraordinary choreographer and dancer in the literal, kinaesthetic sense. While I have a lot of respect for her work, I haven’t dedicated much attention to it in this thesis because I have opted to deal with those authors for whom dance is primarily a conceptual activity, perhaps no less virtuosic, but not so often conventionally accepted under the notion of dance. Also, and more importantly, whereas it seemed to me that a longer historical introduction was necessary for the chapter on Thomas Lehmen, in order to understand what he is engaged with,
beginning of his performance career, he would usually credit himself as the one responsible for ‘concept and direction’ of the performance, whereas dance and choreography was attributed to his collaborators. Such were the pieces *Forbidden Fruit* (1989), choreographed and danced by Mark Sieczkarek, *Vento* (1990), performed by Ricardo Bittencourt, *Verdi Prati* (1992), choreographed and danced by Rodolfo Leoni and *Geraldo’s Solo* (1995), choreographed and danced by Geraldo Si Loureiro. This choice reflected the fact that at the beginning of his solo career the field of dance was much more reluctant to accept non-trained dancers as legitimate parts of the arts scene; but also the fact that the standardized knowledge of the dance community understanding of what constitutes dance became internalised so that Hoghe was, in effect, performing a self-censoring act. Even though he talks about himself in those terms (as a dancer and a choreographer) and is a regular guest of dance festivals, he was consciously avoiding this role in his early works. I suspect that this is also due to the respect for the collaboration with Pina Bausch and the difficulty of promoting his own, radically different work under the same notion of ‘dance’.


Both Hoghe and Bel play with their artistic persona and build their work around it. Whilst Bel, however, uses some Duchampian strategies in the way he questions the position of the artist, ironically and parodically playing with the mechanisms

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18 This has changed also due to the influence and the penetration of ‘conceptual dance’ paradigms (including those of the case studies discussed in this thesis) into the field of dance.
of signification, Hoghe constructs a persona using popular narratives and paradigmatic emotional scenarios. In Bel’s work the neutral is the position that becomes visible through the sign construction; in Hoghe the neutral develops through relational positioning.

### 3.3 The Production of Affect

In both his solo work and in his group work, relations work in one of two ways: either as one-to-ones or one-to-manys - the ‘one’ always being Hoghe. It is either Hoghe and the audience (in his solo works) or Hoghe and another performer together with Hoghe and the audience (in his group works). The focus of the attention is always directed at Hoghe and whoever he is relating to on stage at that moment; he is always on one side of the relational equation. There is a clear sense of his particular position in each of his performances, and of his particular position in relation to everybody else. The solo Meinwärts, for instance, is Hoghe’s ‘ requiem’\(^{20}\) for the Jewish tenor and actor Joseph Schmidt who died in a Swiss refugee camp in Gyrenbad near Zürich in October 1942. Fragmented moments of both Hoghe and Schmidt’s biographical narratives are closely entwined in the text of the performance so that the viewer’s sense of linear orientation is troubled – Hoghe, the only person on stage, doubles as the embodiment of both characters. It is Hoghe’s relationship with Schmidt, or Hoghe’s narration of Schmidt, which we see on stage. Meinwärts, Hoghe’s first work that toured extensively is a very fragmented story that resonates with a process of adolescent identification with what is perceived as the Same (Hoghe identifies with Schmidt), as a means of finding the way out of the predetermined role of the Other. Both of them can easily be identified with the Other regarding the dominant, acceptable views on physicality, background and sexuality. Together with Chambre séparée, which deals with the 1950s in Germany and Another Dream, located mainly in Hoghe’s memories of the 1960s, Meinwärts forms a trilogy of the 20th century. Each of these performances positions Hoghe in relation to popular stars of either the 1940s, 50s or 60s in Germany.

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\(^{19}\) This means that there is always a sense in which all relations start with him and are directed to him; he is the other half of all relations on stage. In his group works, other performers are only in the relationship with him, not with each other.

The text of *Another Dream* is a series of sentences, all beginning with ‘I remember’, which enumerate Hoghe’s points of remembrance of certain images, events and people from that part of his life (Audrey Hepburn in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* [1961], Judy Garland on the stage of the Palace Theatre in New York saying I’ll stay as long as you want me’, a star postcard from the pop singer Rex Gildo with the dedication ‘All the best and love’, the photos of children’s faces burned by Napalm in Vietnam, the starched petticoats of his sister, etc.). This ‘I remember’ formula creates a clear positioning of the word ‘I’ on one side of the sentence and his memories on the other. The word ‘remember’ functions like a bridge taking you to the other side. Hoghe manages to create almost an additional object of the relationality, some tangible space which positions itself between him and the other thing or person, as if to bring it closer and create distance at the same time. ‘Others’ in his work are numerous, but they are always either mediated through Hoghe, or they are haunting him or being haunted by him: a prominent role is, for instance, held by Joseph Schmidt and his unnamed friend who died of AIDS in *Meinwärts* (1994). Also, in his *Boléro Variations* (2007), we hear the voice of a survivor of Auschwitz, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who was a member of the concentration camp orchestra; 36, *Avenue Georges Mandel* (2007) is dedicated to Maria Callas. However, many more characters pass through his work: Mike, a young prostitute from Hannover, Jackie Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe, Jacques Brel. None of these characters are visible on stage, yet Hoghe turns their absent presence into a physical presence through sounds and images. Deliberately positioning himself apart, in relation to another, he sets up the stage for the perception of his vulnerability and exclusion, and for the materialization of the relationship with Others.

Apart from his relationship with Others on stage, one of the important things for understanding his production of sentiments is Hoghe’s relationship with objects. There are some powerful moments for provoking empathy linked with his relationship with the objects that are to be found in the fragmented text of *Meinwärts*:

Berlin, February 13, 1943
For the Attention of the Chief Financial Officers of Berlin and Brandenburg:

Alfred Israel Bieber, born on October 6, 1906, and his wife Ruth Sara Bieber, née Deligdisch, born on December 27, 1912, both last residing at Auguststrasse 17 c/o Auerbach, Berlin N4, migrated to the protected territories with Eastern Transport 23 under shipment numbers 24,562 and 24,563 on October 29, 1942. The following items from the migrants' possession are currently being stored in our furniture warehouse: 2 wardrobes with mirrors, damaged / 2 bedside tables / 1 washing stand (1 drawer missing) / 2 beds with mattress covers / 1 small suitcase / feather beds / 1 piano. The piano has been valued at approximately 150 Reichsmark. The remaining furniture may be regarded as completely worthless, as it has been largely demolished.21

The tone of the note: dry, indifferent, matter-of-fact, focused on dates and numbers in an attempt to reflect factuality and precision. The perfect organization of an acceptable social mechanism for the ‘peaceful’ removal of the Jewish citizens from Germany, spoken in a theatre, 53 years later, with the full knowledge of the horrors of the Holocaust which reside in the collective memory and with Hannah Arendt’s thesis on the ‘banality of evil’22 in mind, functions as an infallible emotional trigger. Further on, there is an underlying assumption that if the process is done ‘properly’, if you make lists of furniture, possessions, if you assign numbers to the people involved, if you catalogue them and their possessions, you are excused from the atrocity of the act of sending innocent people to their death. You are somehow legitimizing it, turning it into a civilized act. And yet, this is precisely the point being made, that the Holocaust was a ‘civilized’ act, a calculated operation where the efficacy of the system gained greater importance over its abominable nature.23 What is especially productive as

23 Eyal Sivan’s brilliant documentary The Specialist (1999), edited from over 500 hours of footage from the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the German officer in charge of SS transportation and the logistics of the ‘Final Solution’, focuses precisely on this ‘ordinariness of the face of evil’. The
a means of generating emotions is the seemingly value-neutral introduction which is then followed by an entirely value-infused judgment: the furniture ‘may be regarded as completely worthless’ as if the value of the furniture could be entirely reduced to its functionality: ‘2 wardrobes with mirrors, damaged; 1 washing stand (1 drawer missing)’. It is as if the worthlessness of the furniture is an inevitable consequence of its lack. A parallel with Hoghe’s body and its lack of functionality, its impairment, hangs awkwardly in the air. There is also another uncomfortable parallel here, between the process of evaluating the furniture, and the strategy of dealing with time that Hoghe is practicing in his performances. Time and habit are key to the social production of sentiments outside of the theatre – they are crucial in the process of turning emotions into sentiments.

Actions in Hoghe’s performances take time; they are ritualized, repetitive, habitual. It is as if Hoghe is utilizing time, and our awareness of the passing of time when watching his performances as a means of adding value to the action - the way that the furniture gains value in a family life just by being in the family for a long time. The furniture earns its ‘belonging’ into the family because it is used by that family, because it shares space and time with the relevant moments of a family’s life. Its value resides partially outside of its functionality.

Hoghe is materializing the ‘unpresent’ – physicalising the metaphysical relations - turning emotions into material objects that exist in the physical space. He is also undertaking a parallel, reverse action of dematerializing the material, turning furniture into a pure pain of loss, separation, disappearance and obsoleteness.

Relying on these two strategies, Hoghe is building the fabric of his performances so that each action becomes a pulsating emotional response, where pain and loss become hologram images of objects.

3.4 Affective clusters
Hoghe’s strategy in the production of affects will be more clearly visible if I first single out particular moments/actions across his productions. These moments take on the place of affective clusters around which emotional tension is organized.

film shows Eichmann trying to prove his strengths as a good and conscientious administrator and an effective planner of transport organization.
Hoghe’s stage is black, and usually completely bare in the moment when the performance starts. And yet, this bareness is very different from Bel’s bareness. Bel was stripping away the stage, removing the extra layers that prevent us from seeing the performance ‘itself’, taking off everything that can be taken off and then working with what is still left after everything else has been taken away (saliva, hairs, the red colour of the skin, urine and, finally, a utopia of signs without referents), trying to reach a state of ‘pure’ signification. Hoghe has a different relationship with both space and objects; in the same way that he materializes relations and emotions, he produces the ‘spirituality’ of objects. The stage is not empty as an attempt to reach into the minus of the performance, which would be Bel’s strategy. The stage is not empty at all, in fact, in Hoghe’s work. It is already full of everything, of ghosts, of pain, of memories. The stage is so saturated that objects need to be brought on one by one, or in small amounts so that we can perceive them. The objects that appear on stage in his performances are always the ones performers bring along, as an act of revealing, an act of allowing enough attention for everything that happens on stage. Usually only one or a couple of them are brought on at a time: chairs (Swan Lake, 4 Acts), ice cubes (Swan Lake, 4 Acts), a bowl of water (Rite of Spring), white handkerchiefs (Swan Lake, 4 Acts), thin red wooden sticks (Chambre Séparée), a square piece of red cloth (Rite of Spring), plaster strips dipped in water (Boléro Variations), milk (L’Après-midi, Boléro Variations), rice (Boléro Variations), flowers (Lettere Amorose). The objects that Hoghe uses are mundane objects, as many critics have previously observed but what is interesting is that he doesn’t treat them as mundane objects – in his hands and in his performances they become objects of

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24 Hoghe approaches performing outdoors with a kind of zen acceptance. ‘Personally I also think that it’s a special thing to perform outdoors because some things are beyond your control. The wind was blowing last night for example, and a cat even appeared onstage during the performance! You can’t anticipate these things beforehand but it is refreshing to accept all of them as they happen and do your work alongside these environmental elements. For me they are not disturbing - I accept them, and I enjoyed working with these different qualities in the performance.’ Raimund Hoghe in Mary Kate Connolly, ‘The Art of Collage’, a conversation with Raimund Hoghe at Montpellier Danse 2008, Dance Theatre Journal, 2 (2009), http://kulturserver-gnw.de/home/hoghe/en/en_art_of_collage.html [accessed 5 December 2009].

sacred powers: capable of bringing back the dead, reviving memories, healing the wounded, a mode of organizing space, a way of providing acceptance for that which is difficult to accept. Their usage in the performance turns them into powerful objects, as if under the spell of a wizard, or the hand of a priest. Ritual is often mentioned in relation to his work and this is no superficial connection. Rituals transfigure mundane objects into something else, they stand in for physical embodiments of metaphors, and there is something magical about them: wine as blood of Christ, a young male’s transition to becoming a grown-up man. In Roman Catholic theology, for instance, ‘transubstantiation’ means precisely the changing of the substance of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Eucharist. That which is accessible to the senses, however, remains the same as before. (‘It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing’ [John 6:54]). St. Hilary of Poitiers says (De Trin. viii): ‘There is no room for doubt regarding the truth of Christ's body and blood; for now by our Lord's own declaring and by our faith His flesh is truly food, and His blood is truly drink.’ And St. Ambrose says (De Sacram. vi): ‘As the Lord Jesus Christ is God's true Son so is it Christ's true flesh which we take, and His true blood which we drink.’ However, Christ's true body and blood in this sacrament cannot be detected through the senses, but by faith alone, which rests upon Divine authority. Hoghe’s work promotes an idea that it is possible to reach this transubstantiation via performance, through art. Art functions as an act of faith. Belief is a notion that has been monopolized by the Church and organized religion, whereas its contemporary instances are concrete works of art, such as Hoghe’s. In order to be

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26 The use of plaster strips that are left to dry on his shoulders (Boléro Variations) is a reminder of the plaster cast for his back that he was advised to sleep in as a child. This practice of sleeping in ‘shields’ was not only used for severe cases of scoliosis. I used to wear one during the night for years, too. It is a fascinating object, resembling a torture device rather than a medical aid.

27 He wore a pair of patent leather shoes in Meinwarte, ‘as a connection with the opera singer Joseph Schmidt’ (Mary Kate Connolly, ‘The Art of Collage’, a conversation with Raimund Hoghe at Montpellier Danse 2008, Dance Theatre Journal, 2 (2009), http://kulturserver- nrw.de/home/rhoghe/en/en_art_of_collage.html [accessed 5 December 2009], but then he read a book about Ravel by Jean Echenuz, where it is mentioned that Ravel was always conducting in the same shoes. So Hoghe wears them in Boléro Variations as well.

28 See footnote 22.


30 Ibid.
able to perceive Hoghe’s ‘transubstantiation’, or the way he uses ‘magic’, one first needs to be ready to invest in it.

In matters of magic it is not so much a question of knowing what the specific properties of the magician are, or those of instruments, operations and magical representations, but of determining the foundation of the collective belief, or better, of the collective misrecognition, collectively produced and maintained, which is at the source of the power that the magician appropriates.\(^{31}\)

What is at the core of this misrecognition, or rather, how is this misrecognition structured? I will return to this question later in this chapter.

The second ‘action’ I want to examine is the reduction of the visual display of affects as an economy of expression. Hoghe’s face remains unchanged in all of his performances. It is literally expressionless, and so are the faces of his performers. By reducing the visual display of affects in terms of the expression on his and other dancers faces, he is maximizing the reaction of the audience. It is almost as if the audience needs to compensate for the lack of expression on his face, as if one wants to fill that gap, that void. There is nothing engaged about his lack of expression; he is not actively suppressing expression, it seems that the absence of expression comes effortlessly. It seems that there is no work involved in it, no training. It appears as if it just ‘is’ like that.

The consistent lack of expression on Hoghe’s face can be read through Emanuel Levinas’ concept of the face. The face, for Levinas, is the way of encountering the Other, yet one should not be too fixed on trying to completely identify it with the actual part of the head where the eyes, nose and lips are. That resistance towards completely identifying the face with that part of human body is a resistance towards the literal, towards a tendency to fixate on appearances: ‘The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes! When one observes the colour of the eyes one is not in a social relationship with the

Other.32 It seems to me that Levinas is warning against being stuck in visual perception and experience, which is always particular. If we want to think about the relationship with the Other, we cannot give in to thinking about the relationship with particular others in our life, because by reducing the Other to a concrete other – that which makes the Other what it is - the concept of the Other gets lost. It is an incentive to think about real encounters with concrete people as a trigger that alerts us to the existence of the Other, but they cannot be identified with that Other. If we start noticing the colour of someone’s eyes we are already in a personal relationship with him or her: he or she starts to stand out from the crowd, we have noticed him or her. But what we cannot avoid, and should not avoid is the understanding that this person does have some colour of his eyes even though it can be any. This is why, I would argue, Levinas needs the idea of the face, but again, does not want his readers to fixate on it. Levinas says:

The way in which the Other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the Other in me, we here name face. This mode does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its ideatum – the adequate idea.33

Colin Davis reads Levinas’ face placing the emphasis on the idea that alterity rests beyond that which is perceivable through visuals or even that which is experiential:

The face may be a real part of the human body available to be encountered, seen and experienced; but for Levinas it is before all else the channel through which alterity presents itself to me, and as such it lies outside and beyond what can be seen or experienced. Both the reality of the encounter and the elusiveness of the face are crucial to Levinas’ argument. Without the possibility of real encounters, the Other would be a senseless abstraction; but if the encounter were only phenomenal and thus could easily become an object of perception or knowledge, then it would be reduced to just another non-event in the subject’s sovereign possession of the world.34

And yet, understanding of the Other is dependent on real encounters, and it cannot simply be a conceptual abstraction. By keeping his face expressionless, and yet visible and present through that lack of expression in his performances, Hoghe is inviting a reading which focuses on the ‘beyond’ of his face, a reading which does not stop on the interpretations of his face or the cues it gives – because there is nothing to be read from it other than the fact that it is. Hoghe’s back is his face, in Levinas’ sense, and because of the way human perception culturally works, we are not as sensitised towards reading people’s backs as we are towards reading their faces – that is why Hoghe’s back can be many other backs and yet cannot be an unsignified, Everyman’s back, because it is specific and what is specific about it is its alterity. Hoghe’s back is specific enough not to be Everyman’s back, to prevent general identification – it has to be perceived as alterity – and yet, not specific enough that it would make him unique for us, fixed in the particularity of a personal encounter. The ability of abstraction that Levinas’ concept of the Other brings is very important, not as a precise term, because it obviously isn’t, but as that which serves as an incentive for a way out of personal narcissism. Hoghe’s face offers an intimation of the problem of love and narcissism. On some level, the ‘beyond’ of the face is parallel to the concept of singularity in Deleuze that I used for the analysis of Thomas Lehmen’s work (see pp. 132-135). The animosity between Riderhood and other people in the room disappears when they are able to see a life in him, rather then his ghastly personality or how he had hurt them before. This tension between the particular and the general is the main manifestation of the operation of the neutral, of which the ability to see ‘beyond’ the face is an example.

Rearrangement of props on stage is the third emotional cluster in Hoghe’s work. This inexpressiveness of the face transposes expression in other, perhaps unexpected areas: as in the simple moving of objects around the stage. This is evident in the way Hoghe arranges the Japanese garden in Lettère Amorose; in the pouring of ‘a little jug of milk into a bright red glass saucer, displaying it to the audience, waiting for a particularly devastating crash in the music and sipping it’.

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in Another dream; in the spraying of the powder across his face in Boléro variations; in the cleaning of the stage in Swan Lake, 4 Acts; in the opening of the blanket he is wrapped in for 36, Avenue Georges Mandel; in the red stick with which he marks his back in Meinwärts; in the wet strips of plaster left to dry into a plaster cast on his shoulder in Boléro variations; in the fan, a red shirt, a doll’s house mirror in Another dream; in putting on a plastic cast of his hunch over his hunch in Meinwärts, which is then dragged over his front and finally has a lighter passed over it. The sensation one has when watching Hoghe perform these actions is that of watching a person visiting someone’s grave, wiping the marble board, removing the fallen leaves, taking out dried out flowers and placing a new bouquet in their place, lighting the candle in the red plastic shield – all these everyday actions, which we undertake regularly just because they are happening in the context of a cemetery, become so heavy, so burdened with memories, so intense, that it is painful to watch. And Hoghe manages to create that same heaviness, that same burden and hardship, that same memory strain without the context of a cemetery, or a church where a marriage is taking place, or any of these places where emotions are legitimate in their extremes. It is as if those simple gestures are pregnant with everything his face lacks and we are watching the drama of a different order unfolding. This perceptual neutrality is a strategy for the production of affects. The affect comes from the outside, from the water in the bowl, from the quick running down the stage, from the little feet tapping in the dark.

In Swan Lake, 4 Acts, for instance, Hoghe is running or walking around the other dancers, with or without his shirt turning into wings. He is usually in the seemingly marginal position of someone who serves his own performance, who is taking care of it: bringing chairs and taking them away, cleaning, mopping the floor when ice-cubes drip on the surface turning it into an image of a lake; arranging two-dimensional paper figurines of swans on the floor, covering them with white handkerchiefs (maybe to prevent them from catching cold or putting them to sleep), lifting up the dance floor lines and placing them back. The image of cleaning holds a double status in the ‘meaning’ economy of our civilization –
on one hand it is a degrading activity, disrespectful, that requires no additional training, is badly paid, monotonous and holds no potential for development. Unwillingness to engage in cleaning activities is one of the cornerstones of teenage rebellion: cleaning being understood as something that does not reveal anything about the world, and holds us trapped in what we already know, our own rooms and houses, with our parents. Cleaning indicates servitude and obedience, it is related to the middle-class ideals of order and decency. However, cleaning can also be perceived (in traditional Eastern philosophical perspectives) as a spiritual activity, which makes us face the fact of inevitable decay, disappearance and transformation of everything into something else.

*The Rite of Spring*, a duo with Lorenzo De Brabandere is a good example of the way Hoghe constructs his choreographies creating images of support. *The Rite of Spring* opens with De Brabandere and Hoghe lying on the floor, face down, in the shape of an inverse letter L, Hoghe’s ankles placed on top of De Brabandere’s while the tape is playing an interview with Stravinsky talking about the reactions to the premiere in 1913 of ‘The Rite of Spring’. In this duet most of the movements could be called ‘movement tasks’ because it is easy to translate them into a set of simple written instructions (which is not usually the case with dance scores): run in a circle around the stage, kneel, press your palms against the palms of the other person, lean on his palms, let him lean on yours; while one person is fixed in a push up, the other person crawls underneath him, then the same thing happens in reverse etc. The other thing that runs through most of the movements as a common point is the fact that they are based on the idea of support, assistance, leaning and an exchange of weight between De Brabandere and Hoghe. One body is placed in the position of supporting the other, easing the fall, as a cushion between the floor and the other body, with one pair of feet leaning on top of the other, De Brabandere enables Hoghe to move across the floor by ensuring the resistance of Hoghe’s feet against his feet, holding hands and forming circles with their hands in the air while looking in each other’s eyes. Even the support is subdued, it is happening in a matter-of-fact way, more as a result of the laws of causes and consequences, working with gravitational forces and bodies in space. The emotional moment detected in the activity of ‘supporting’ the other person, ‘leaning on’ him or her is, at the same time, a
logical moment: if you start falling, I will catch you, if you lean forward, I will lean back, if you push my feet, you will help me to move. It is not accidental that ‘a leaning’ also stands for inclination, tendency, predisposition, preference, attraction, liking, fondness. These images all create a sense of interdependency and construct the persona of Hoghe as someone who needs to lean on other people and who wants other people to lean on him, in an act of mutual reliance.

3.5 The Body that is not Other

In the communication between the audience and Raimund Hoghe, in the way the audience is looking at Hoghe’s body, many automated metaphorical and associative mechanisms are activated. Hoghe wants to place his body centre stage; this is evident from the choice of the opening photograph on his website. On the one hand, his body is a ‘natural’ body – natural in the sense that it does not seem to have the muscular physicality of the dancer’s body that is produced as a side effect of years of training. His body does not suggest a ‘regimentalised’ body, it is not a body subjected to a regularity of strenuous exercises. It is not a ‘controlled’ body, marked and shaped by rigorous exercise routines. Hoghe’s body is not a malleable body, pursued in exercise gyms, physical education and sport programmes, a body turned into a tool where its mechanics are clearly governed and ruled according to various sets of principles.

And yet, Hoghe’s body differs from a ‘natural’ body in so far as we think of a ‘natural’ body as a neutral body, the body that does not draw attention to itself, the body that functions smoothly, ‘normally’, according to a standard. His body is extraordinary, peculiar. Hoghe’s body is a non-representative body, in the sense that it does not ‘represent’ the dominant model of how a normal body should look, and yet, it is very ‘representative’ meaning that it gives the strong impression of standing for something in particular: its signification potential is more powerful than that of an ordinary body. It seems caught in the grip of a determinate and determined signification mechanism before the performance has even started rather than as a result of the way the performance develops. His body seems to

37 The photo has subsequently changed. For a number of years the photo showed him wrapped in a blanket.
produce a sign construction that exists independently of what happens on stage, because its expressive power is a priori given. Whereas no process of signification can exist outside or independent of a context, and every sign structure is predominately contextual, Hoghe’s body draws attention to its pre-determinacy in a pre-performative context, in the universe outside of the rules set up by the given production. To an extent, this is, of course, always the case, however, it is more acutely present in the perception of Hoghe’s body on stage. His body is very ‘theatrical’ and at the same time ‘anti-theatrical’ in a similar way to which animals and children on stage cause a rupture, a hole in the performance that completely draws attention to itself and makes all other elements on stage insignificant.38

In Hoghe’s work there is a great emphasis on the display of his body – in all of his works there is a moment when he takes off his shirt (rarely his trousers) and remains standing for a while, his back turned to the audience. Sometimes he points a flashlight to the various points on his back or he uses a long, thin, red stick with which he touches and crosses his back. Other times he hangs from a sling, his feet dangling in the air, his back again turned to the audience. And yet the very idea of the ‘display’ of the body is closely tied in with the fact that his body is extra-ordinary. The question arises whether we would even consider this act of removing the shirt as an act of ‘displaying the body’ if his body wasn’t a non-average body. He ‘suffers from’ spina bifida or a certain curvature of the spine. The phrase ‘suffers from’ constructs him as the victim of his own body, of someone who looks as if he must suffer. In a lecture – part of a presentation of his work at Goethe Institute in New York in July 2009, Hoghe said

I take my shirt off, and it’s such a big thing. People are naked or there is violence onstage, and I just take off my shirt and show a different body. I don’t have any pain with my body. I don’t suffer physically. And dancers say, ‘It is incredible what you can do.’ The last bolero is so hard, but it is harder for the dancers than for me. And I do the longest bolero. People

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38 Nicholas Ridout deals extensively with this paradox in his book *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* when he claims that ‘anti-theatrical practices are so unavoidably theatrical in their engagement with the question of theatre [which] may suggest that the strongest inflections of the anti-theatrical prejudice are to be found within theatre itself.’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 6. I think it is simply important to note here that the presentation of realness, just like the representation of the real, is also a theatrical mechanism.
think, he is suffering and he is not able, and this is not true. They think I suffer, and I don’t.\textsuperscript{39}

There is something unbearable about the idea of suffering. It is not so much that the visual image of suffering is unbearable, but the understanding (or misunderstanding) of suffering that is incited in the viewer who does not possess the framework to give this pain a form and a shape: what kind of pain is it? How does it hurt? Hoghe’s body creates a narrative prior to the narrative of his performance. Partly, Hoghe is giving form to pain by creating a performance, he is alleviating that pain by giving it shape, by framing it as an artwork. If, on the other hand, he manages to convince the audience that he is not suffering, a different narrative occurs. Looking at his body might provide a sense of relief; an assurance that not everything that looks painful is painful, and it helps us to minimize the pain we feel for the things that look abandoned, broken or abused.

In his writings about the victim, Lyotard is interested in the victim’s rhetorical position. According to Lyotard, what makes victim a victim is not his physical suffering but the inability to present his position within the constraints of the dominant discourse.\textsuperscript{40} It is difficult to hear the victim if she wants to participate in the discourse as a victim. It is almost as if the victim’s victimhood will only be perceived if s/he does not behave as a victim, if she has already risen above her victimhood and then, from that acquired ‘neutral’ position, assuming that particular authority, speaks back about the process of victimisation. One of the bases for participation in discourse in the philosophical tradition is precisely the state of chosen blindness towards that which is considered irrelevant for that discourse, such as the particularities of a person’s individual position – his particular physical manifestation. An insistence on showing Hoghe’s body in the context of a dance performance problematises a particular rhetorical position of differently able bodies. Amongst similarly structured dancer’s bodies, their differences in performance, in development of certain skills, in their virtuosity,


become what makes their artistry. And with Hoghe the process is almost reversed: it is the particularities of his body which he draws on in his artistic work. In a classical aesthetical rhetoric, there is nothing aesthetical about it. The body is given, there is no labour invested in it. The aesthetic process is defined in the contrast with nature – art is that which is laboured on, not that which is given by nature. Art is that which wins over the nature. In a pre-postmodern rhetoric, Hoghe would attempt to beat his own body, trying to do better than the dancers who are more conventionally built, in an attempt to surpass the given of his own body. And yet in his work, Hoghe has reversed that process. What the victim wants, is to stop being a victim, and yet the only way of not being a victim for Hoghe is to openly display that which victimises him: his own body.

Hoghe’s body is strange, unusual, odd, funny, curious, bizarre, weird, queer, unexpected, unfamiliar, abnormal, atypical, anomalous, out of the ordinary; exceptional, extraordinary, remarkable; puzzling, mystifying, mysterious, perplexing, baffling; suspicious, eerie, uncanny, unnatural, freaky, fishy, creepy, spooky, bizarre, eccentric, unusual, offbeat, distinctive, characteristic, distinct, individual, special, idiosyncratic, unique, personal. Numerous adjectives are used to describe that which doesn’t fit with our pre-conceived notions of what is standard, significantly more than those related to the word normal\textsuperscript{41} and yet, ‘normal’ allows for a wider range of differences, because it is less specific than abnormal. Because of the statistical dominance of the ‘normal’,\textsuperscript{42} there are more variations on what is normal, however nuanced they might be.

\textsuperscript{41} Oxford Dictionaries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)
\textsuperscript{42} In the introduction to this thesis (p. 17), I have mentioned the process of normalization that Croatian society longed for after the turbulent 1990s. However, the longing for the normal in that context (as a desire to live in the society which would operate functionally, rather then in a perpetual state of war), differs from the normal in the syntagme ‘normal body’. In the latter, the normal is purely a statistical category: a Gaussian (or normal) distribution where, to say it in plain English, in any system, there are usually more things that are average, than things that are extraordinary: so normal is that which is dominant. This normalcy doesn’t really hold any of the tension that the neutral I am attempting to construct as a key notion of this thesis carries. There is no play of the opposites here, or baffling of the binary distinctions. I am placing the neutral in the work of Raimund Hoghe in the relationship between Hoghe and the imagined Other. In a sense, the ‘abnormalcy’ of Hoghe’s body is the precondition for the development of the tension in ‘neutrality’.
The Oxford Dictionary seems to be a good resource for the search for the normal because next to a definition of the term there is a short note which describes the word as follows: ‘Most of us want to be regarded as normal, an adjective that implies conformity with established norms or standards and is the opposite of abnormal (: a normal body temperature; normal intelligence).’

Whereas it seems that a ‘regular’ body can stand for anything and nothing, the area in which a non-regular body operates is significantly narrower. A standard body does not communicate the fact that it is standard, it can allow itself to be invisible as a body, and a carrier of various signification clusters, whereas a non-standard body is a narrative in itself, a walking story of How did it happen? What is it that is actually wrong with it? What kind of condition is it? Is it curable? Was he born with it? Does it hurt?

For a non-dancer, it seems easier to relate to an equally non-dancing body such as Hoghe’s. He brings attention to the physicality of the everyday, but at the same time this ‘Hoghe’s everydayness’ is extraordinary. For a non-dancer living in a culture that encourages all sorts of guilt, in this case the predominant one being the guilt that we are not treating our bodies right - not getting enough exercise, not eating healthily and drinking too much - it seems almost a relief to look at a body that does not embody a sign that everything is ‘under control’.

Because the audience’s gaze defines Hoghe’s body as uncomfortable to watch and uncomfortable to be in, it rearticulates the thought of how uncomfortable the fact of being in a body is in general, how the fact of having a body is nothing natural, nothing simple or easy. Even the phrase ‘having a body’ defines our relationship with the body, as something we are, initially, possessing, rather than being. Watching Hoghe’s body we are reminded of the fact that ‘it could have been otherwise’, his body is an indication of something that went wrong, that shouldn’t have been the way it is. A necessary part of the gaze of Hoghe’s body is the automated reaction that things have, somehow, gone wrong. And I think this is the

key to the perception of Hoghe’s body on stage. His body has a particular temporal quality that prevents us from seeing it in the moment, for what it is, because it introduces a different temporality – where the presence of the past in the present is amplified. It is a doubled body, consisting of the body that is (eccentric), and the body that should have been (normal). This existence of the past in the present in Hoghe’s body is repeated on the thematic level – many of Hoghe’s performances are organized through the image of nostalgia, where dated popular songs provide the soundscape for the work realized on stage.

Hoghe’s body also activates the tension between the madman and the poet the way Michel Foucault articulates it in The Order of Things:

[…] the madman fulfils the function of homosemanticism: he groups all signs together and leads them with a resemblance that never ceases to proliferate. The poet fulfils the opposite function: his is the allegorical role; beneath the language of signs and beneath the interplay of their precisely delineated distinctions, he strains his ears to catch that ‘other language’, the language, without words or discourse, of resemblance. The poet brings similitude to the signs that speak it, whereas the madman loads all signs with a resemblance that ultimately erases them […] Between them there has opened up a field of knowledge in which, because of an essential rupture in the Western world, what has become important is no longer resemblances but identities and differences. 44

The figure of ‘madman’ serves as a warning against the type of organisation of signs that is based on resemblances. My neighbour used to say that she trusted me because I am not ugly, and the ugliness of someone’s body is a visible sign of the ugliness within. These ways of perceiving resemblances in completely disconnected things are not only ‘mad’ but they also temporally do belong to medieval times, because that is when they were most prominent. Foucault described this episteme in The Order of Things as ‘The Age of Resemblance’. He argued that the beginning of the 17th century brought about the termination of the ‘move in the element of resemblance’. Descartes discusses this also:

It is a frequent habit, when we discover several resemblances between two things, to attribute to both equally, even on points in which they are in

reality different, that which we have recognized to be true of only one of them.45

And it was also in the nature of things that the knowledge of the sixteenth century should leave behind it the distorted memory of a muddled and disordered body of learning in which all the things in the world could be linked indiscriminately to men’s experiences, traditions, or credulities. From then on, the noble, rigorous, and restrictive figures of similitude were to be forgotten. And the signs that designated them were to be thought of as the fantasies and charms of a knowledge that had not yet attained the age of reason.46

And yet, the 16th century didn’t leave those false resemblances behind, nor did the seventeenth or the eighteenth. In 1796, the German physician Franz Joseph Gall developed the discipline of phrenology, which was massively popular in the 19th century, although it is now considered to be a pseudoscience. Phrenology makes links between a person’s character and the morphology of his or her skull.47

I am not trying to claim that any of these pseudoscientific claims and prejudices determine the reading of Hoghe’s body, but it seems to me that they linger on a self-referential level or articulated level that has already, centuries ago, taken a stand against these prejudices as having any kind of truth. They are present in the perception of the work ‘in inverted commas’, not in its literal, direct

45 René Descartes, Regulae ad directionem ingenii, quoted in Foucault, The Order of Things, p. 56.
46 Foucault, The Order of Things, p. 57.
47 George Combe, Elements of Phrenology (Boston: Marsh, Capen & Lyon, 1835). The links Dr. Gall makes, for instance, between someone’s eyes as his talent are as stated: ‘Some years afterwards […] he still met individuals endowed with an equally great talent of learning to repeat. He then observed, that his schoolfellows, so gifted, possessed prominent eyes, and recollected, that his rivals in the first school had been distinguished by the same peculiarity. When he entered the University, he directed his attention, from the first, to the students whose eyes were of this description, and found that they excelled in getting rapidly by heart, and giving correct recitations, although many of them were by no means distinguished in point of general talent. This observation was recognised also by the other students in the classes; and, although the connection betwixt the talent and the external sign was not at this time established upon such complete evidence as is requisite for a philosophical conclusion, Dr. Gall could not believe that the coincidence of the two circumstances was entirely accidental. From that period, therefore, he suspected that they stood in an important relation to each other’ (pp. 14-15). Thus phrenology attributes every particular sentiment, such as self-Esteem, destructiveness, benevolence or justice an exact place in the brain (or organ of the brain) and directly associates its physical size to the presence of this sentiment with the character of the person. It makes claims such as that of Love of Approbation organ ‘is larger in women in general than in men’. Or that ‘The French are more remarkable for a larger development of it that of Self-Esteem; and on this account appear to the English, in whom the latter faculty predominates, vain, ostentatious, and absurdly complimentary’(p. 64).
understanding. Today, we don’t think that ‘Hoghe’s body reflects his character’ but that type of thinking exists as a thought of the second order: it used to be considered within the legitimate discourse of the ‘science’ that one would identify the form of one’s body with one’s character. They hover around the work as a compendium of distorted thoughts and beliefs that were once a part of a human understanding of the world. Hoghe’s body embodies the memory of those misconceptions, misinterpretations and pseudo-sciences which were formed in an attempt to give meaning to those occurrences which challenged humanity’s understanding of a benevolent world. They are signs of a strong desire to turn the ‘neutral’ fabric of life – a certain DNA combination or genetic mutation which transformed Hoghe’s curvature of the spine into a coherent narrative. A product of chance is promoted into a closed signification structure. The ‘because’ of biology isn’t ‘because’ enough. There has to be a human ‘because’ as well. And a human ‘because’ is usually a moral ‘because’. Hoghe’s body echoes with forced ‘because’ of pain and fear, it is a combination of pleading and false reasoning: ‘Please don’t let that happen to my child’ and ‘This can only happen to those who have, this way or the other, deserved it. There must be a moral correlation to this physical deformation, otherwise it is pointless’. There is something ‘artistic’ in this false reasoning because what it does is turn something accidental into a narrative, with a beginning, an end, and, most importantly, a point. It is worth thinking about the narratives of a great majority of men and women expecting a child that one comes across almost daily: they hope for a healthy and ‘normal’ child. Regardless of the enormous change in the perception of a disabled body that occurred in the past 50 years or so, the gaze is still saying: ‘I would prefer that my child does not look like you’. I would rather not. This negation is the fabric of Hoghe’s body as a narrative body. In short, in our desire to interpret, Hoghe’s body can be treated as a sign of a stronger order than if it wasn’t for the curvature of his spine.

Hoghe is very determined and straightforward about the motto under which he works – he is obviously putting his body forward. It can be found on his website, immediately after his biography.
Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote of throwing the body into the fight. These words inspired me to go on stage. Other inspirations are the reality around me, the time in which I live, my memories of history, people, images, feelings and the power and beauty of music and the confrontation with one’s own body which, in my case, does not correspond with conventional ideals of beauty. To see bodies on stage that do not comply with the norm is important - not only with regard to history but also with regard to present developments, which are leading humans to the status of design objects. On the question of success: it is important to be able to work and to go your own way - with or without success. I simply do what I have to do.48

Hoghe’s perception of his work differs from the performance discourse of Jérôme Bel and Thomas Lehmen whose work I have analysed in the two previous chapters. His ideas of what he is doing when he is making a performance mark a certain return to the link between dance and authenticity, well established at the beginning of the 20th century49 that both Bel and Lehmen are deconstructing. The very idea of ‘throwing the body into the fight’ as something one does when one performs reminds us of a perception of dance as a self-developing ritual, that is transformative for the person taking part in it. To go ‘your own way’ and simply ‘do what [one] has to do’ seems to presuppose that there is ‘one’s own way’ that needs to be followed and that there is something ‘[one] has to do’ before [one] even started. Hoghe’s motto sounds old-fashioned both in its reconstitution of the personal, individual path, the lack of the distance between the performer and the person performing, even the lack of consciousness of the ‘performance’. Hoghe is not ‘performing’ throwing the body into the fight; it is rather that by performing, he is throwing the body into the fight. Of course, this is a performance. There is also something old-fashioned about the arguing for the duty that needs to be done in contrast with the dominant ideas of the contemporary neo-liberal economy, where everything is revolving around the ‘paths’ we chose and the ‘decisions’ we make. Hoghe’s statement can at the same time be read as the affirmation of his individual path, but also as a positioning of an agency outside of the subject – ‘doing what I have to do’ resonates with a certain Other who decided that ‘what needs to be done’ is, in contrast to the ‘I am doing what I want to do’.

48 Raimund Hoghe, see http://www.raimundhoghe.com/english.php [accessed 12 October 2010].
49 I have analysed this link in the opening pages of the previous chapter, see pp. 113-116.
There is a danger in Hoghe’s work of a ‘bourgeois emotionalism’, a tendency to wallow in self-indulgent feelings rather than to engaging actively with ‘the world’. In the performance Meinworts (1994), Hoghe’s main focus of attention is Joseph Schmidt.\textsuperscript{50} Here is the quotation from Hoghe’s text used in the performance Meinwarts:

On May 10, 1933, one day after the dazzling premiere of his film "Ein Lied geht um die Welt" (My Song Goes 'Round the World) in Berlin’s "Ufa-Palast," there was more going up in smoke in the German capital than banned books. The Nazis' main propaganda mouthpiece, the "Völkische Beobachter" paper, wrote of the premiere: "What we want (and what we will get!) could scarcely be more different. Throughout the film there is talk about the singer being too short, too ugly. Yet he is sooo [sic] gifted and so noble at heart, so moving, that no angel could be more pure... But what isn't said - and is therefore all the more obvious - is that he is a Jew."

Hoghe very wisely uses the quote from the Nazi press which describes the other side of the perception of Otherness, and in so doing opens up the problem with the binary gap: either the Other is a caricature of evil, or s/he is a caricature of good. In either case, the Other exists only as a symbol, not as a fully-fledged human being. The Nazi regime tried to parody the narrative of fairy tales, such as the Cinderella story, mocking the narrative of false appearances which hide truth, of false values which are in place of substance, whilst reaffirming the sign of equivalence between what immediately appears and what doesn’t: what looks ‘ugly’ or ‘nonstandard’ is ‘evil’ for the Nazi regime.

In his lecture performances, but also on many other occasions, Hoghe claims that ‘audiences today cannot identify with his body because it does not conform to contemporary ideals of beauty’,\textsuperscript{51} and this is where love comes in as cotton wool, to provide a pacifier for these tensions. Hoghe confronts beauty with love and neutralizes the issue of beauty with that of love. Beauty itself is not an unproblematic means for the production of emotions. The viewing of Hoghe’s

\textsuperscript{50} See p. 150.
\textsuperscript{51} Raimund Hoghe at a panel discussion at ‘Writing on Performance Conference’ at the Laban Centre in London (March 2007), quoted in Mary Kate Connolly, ‘An Audience with the Other: The Reciprocal Gaze of Raimund Hoghe’s Theatre’, Forum Modernes Theater, 1 (2008), 61-70 (p. 62).
body can produce an ‘uncomfortable level of self-reflection’; 52 but I would suggest that it creates an interest in how love is produced. Discussing the myth of the perfect body, Roberta Galler suggests that ‘just as society creates an ideal of beauty which is oppressive […] it creates an ideal model of the physically perfect person who is not beset with weakness […] or pain’. A non-normative body onstage undermines such an impossible notion of beauty and reminds us ‘how tenuous that […] myth of the perfect body really is’. 53 However, the myth of a perfect body makes us think of the way emotions are produced. There is a different way of perceiving imperfection. It could be argued that imperfection is easier to love.

And as birds seek refuge in the leafy recesses of a tree, feelings escape into the shaded wrinkles, the awkward movements and inconspicuous blemishes of the body we love, where they can lie low in safety. And no passer-by would guess that it is just here, in what is defective and censurable, that the feeling darts of adoration nestle. 54

Perfection is impenetrable; it is self-sufficient. Perfection does not communicate; it is lack which communicates. Lack is something one can think about, engage with, try to solve, heal, or comfort. Lack is that which can provide a fertile ground for the emergence of compassion, empathy and love.

However, if we argue for that, we are again caught up in a binary between an evil demon (who is so evil that his evilness is apparent – it is his ugliness) and an ugly, kind-hearted angel (who should teach us the problems of falsely attributing characteristics of appearances to personality traits). If we argue that lack is more loveable than perfection, we have not moved very far from the need to schematize.

It is important now to return to the question of the source of the collective misrecognition, collectively produced and maintained, which is at the source of

52 Mary Kate Connolly, ‘An Audience with the Other: The Reciprocal Gaze of Raimund Hoghe’s Theatre’, Forum Modernes Theater, 1 (2008), 61-70 (p. 63).
54 Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street and Other Writings (London: Verso, 1985).
the power that the magician appropriates. The source of the collective misrecognition, which is the main problem around which Hoghe’s performance is organised, is the idea that Hoghe’s body is the Other. There is no Other, or rather, the idea of the Other is a construction set in place in order to deal with the problem of acceptance, and with the fact that a human is a social animal. That, of course, doesn’t make it any less powerful. The power of Hoghe’s magic, his ability to transubstantiate mundane objects into something metaphysical is heavily indebted to an essentially false notion of Otherness as an essential quality. That is not Hoghe’s false notion, it is not his mistake; it is the false notion upon which civilization rests, which Hoghe is both exploring and problematizing in his work. It is the problem of a common sense conclusion. The Other is a state of existing as a human being, not a property of any minority, group, religion, or sex. By being human, by having consciousness, we are displaced from merely existing, into the world of existence as a problem. That is what makes us Others to life itself.

Having said that, the construction that Hoghe’s art work is based on, became real, in the sense in which faith does move mountains and heal the terminally ill. It is this operation of faith that Hoghe is disclosing in his work. This operation of faith is much more affectual than cognitive leading us, again, to the importance of sentiments in his performances.

3.6 The Affects of Relation
One of the most historically persistent ways of constructing the relationship between emotions and reason, is, according to, amongst others, Robert C. Solomon, the metaphor of master and slave. The history of philosophy and science argues that emotions need to be governed, tamed, directed, dictated, shaped, corrected by reason, their superior and their better. According to the

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56 In the past several decades, there has been a whole body of work in a wide range of fields and with a variety of methodological approaches interested in affects as a focus of analysis, sometimes called ‘the affective turn’. See: The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social, ed. by Patricia Ticineto Clough, Jean O’Malley Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari were prominent among the authors that inspired those discussions, however, in this chapter I am relying mostly on the more ‘mainstream’ philosophical theories of emotion, because I find them more fitting for the analysis of relatively conventional models of audience-performer relation within which Hoghe is operating. I am mainly drawing from the work of Ben Ze’ev Solomon and De Sousa, who are among those philosophers insisting on the pervasiveness and diversity of emotions. They are opposed by those (Griffiths, Prinz, and DeLancey) who are more
Stoics, emotion is a conceptual error, emotional attachment and involvement are pointless. During the Middle Ages, emotions were understood as being essentially linked with self-absorbed desires and interests.

And yet despite of the insistence on the subservience of emotions to the rational and their inferior role in relation to reason, the opening sentence under the entry ‘Emotion’ in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy states ‘No aspect of our mental life is more important to the quality and meaning of our existence than emotions. They are what make our life worth living, or sometimes ending’.57 Amongst philosophers, Hume and Spinoza were, perhaps, the main ‘defenders’ of emotions. Spinoza's account of the passions (or emotions) basically inverts the Cartesian primacy given to mind. As body and mind are two attributes of the same substance, two aspects of a single reality, to be affected and to affect others is the means by which the knowing subject advances. They either increase the soul’s power to act, or they diminish it, thus making the difference between the best and the worst lives. Hume went even further when he notoriously inverted the opposition and claimed that ‘Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’.58

Perhaps the key to this problem lies in the assumption that emotions and reason are ‘two different natural kinds, two conflicting and antagonistic aspects of the soul’.59 Yet, according to De Sousa, ‘the faculty of emotion is actually required for the more conventional mechanisms of rationality to function’.60 De Sousa claims that emotions are ‘ways of seeing – species of determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies’.61 They make us see the world ‘in terms of’.

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41 Ibid., p. 196.
De Sousa argues that the way emotional states work is through their association with paradigm scenarios, or rather, the way we learn to identify our emotions is through a comparison with existing paradigm scenarios, which in turn influence our emotions. In other words, as we grow up, we are culturally trained (through real life scenarios, or through literature, art, media etc.) in terms of what to feel for, and what not to feel for, but also what kind of emotion to feel in a set of given circumstances through paradigm scenarios. We learn which emotions are appropriate for which situations, and which aren’t.

De Sousa’s thesis is this:

We are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with paradigm scenarios. These are drawn first from our daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art and culture in which we are exposed. Later still, in literate cultures, they are supplemented and refined by literature. Paradigm scenarios involve two aspects: first, a situation type providing the characteristic objects of the specific emotion type, and second, a set of characteristic or ‘normal’ responses to the situation, where normality is first a biological matter and then very quickly becomes a cultural one.  

So, learning to deal with emotions, to use emotional vocabulary appropriately, is the result of acquiring paradigm scenarios for particular situations. Paradigm scenarios define the type of emotional situation we are in. Emotional situations are about recognition and comparison, but they are also about interfering with our paradigm scenarios and changing them. The point is that paradigm scenarios and emotional responses are mutually influential. In short, the paradigm scenario that we read into the situation shapes our emotional response.

When I was discussing a fragment from the text of Meinwärts, I argued that the text functions as an emotional trigger – and that is precisely because it fits into a well known and very complex paradigm scenario – the deportation of Jews during World War II, and the theft of their possessions shown through a detail – their worthless furniture. Paradigm scenarios are acquired via many sources: observation, memory, stories told us by our grandparents or other relatives, stories

told to us in schools or at the playground, school textbooks, gossip, TV, the internet, newspaper articles, plays, performances, films, novels etc. They form our collective cultural memory, a collective cultural memory that Hoghe heavily relies on.

Hoghe’s work, strictly speaking, does not often follow a narrative that could be easily reconstructed as a sequence of events. And that is precisely his strategy. In fragmenting the material, organising it in moments, suggestive and associative actions, simple physical movements, he allows for our paradigm scenarios to work through. He turns the objects into narratives, without organising his material into a narrative. The cast made of Hoghe’s back tells a narrative, even though Hoghe does not choose a particular narrative for the performance. That is how all of his actions are organized – as emotional clusters that are to be filled by the associative links of the audience. These associative links are not arbitrary though, because they rely heavily on cultural coding and paradigm scenarios.

Emotion is a meaningful and necessary concept that is usually treated only as the flavour of a performance, rather than as a central moment in its organisation. Partly, surely, this is because emotions are usually linked with a notion of passivity (one is being affected): emotions are intruding upon ongoing thought and behaviour, something that cannot be controlled. A performance maker might hope to evoke certain emotions, and whether or not they succeed will be one of the criteria in assessing whether the performance is a success or a failure. But I am more interested to see how, in Hoghe’s work, emotions serve as a shorthand to interpersonal processes and mechanisms.

Another crucial idea in relation to emotions is the tight link between ethics and the study of emotions. Hume and Smith argue for the significance and value of what they named ‘the moral sentiments’. The most important of ‘moral sentiments’ is sympathy, our ability to ‘feel with’ other people and share their pain. Emotions are highly functional, because they produce social relations. It is not strange then, that one of the most important emotions in the perception of

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Hoghe’s work is that of compassion. Compassion is used as a strategy for acceptance of that which we, hastily, perceive as different – it forms both a social strategy and an artistic strategy in the case of Hoghe’s work. Or rather, in Hoghe’s work, a social strategy is turned into an artistic strategy.

Compassion implies or creates a social relation between the audience and the performer. Both politically and socially, ‘we cultivate compassion for those lacking the foundations for belonging where we live, and where we live [...] is a community whose fundamental asset is humane recognition.’\(^{64}\) Compassion is a social and aesthetic technology of belonging.

Why is compassion important? Because it draws in the viewer – it places suffering at the centre of being and arranges images of ethical and honourable sociality as a reaction to that suffering. However, compassion produces another reaction: the demonstrated capacity not to turn one’s head away but to embrace a sense of obligation to remember what one has seen, to become involved in a narrative of rescue, amelioration. ‘To take a sad song and make it better’ – that is what narrates the story of a viewer as a good person, a person who is eager to help and who sympathizes. Compassion produces the viewer as a compassionate one, but also the one who is privileged: the sufferer is on the other side. However, there is a certain complicity of the observer in the situation of the sufferer. Compassionate emotions are central to modern subjectivities – there is a modern incitement to feel compassion, that wasn’t part of the narrative of pre-modern times.

Hoghe’s works operate in the domain of the ethico-aesthetical, which is quite unlike the work of Bel and Lehmen and the contemporary dance scene of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s which was mainly concerned with investigations into the medium of dance or the construction of subjectivities. His ethical attitude is closely entwined with his aesthetics. It is interesting in this context to think about the critique of the master narrative of European humanism in postmodernism, which was also directed towards the conceptualisation of the

\(^{64}\) Lauren Berlant, ‘Compassion (and withholding)’, in Emotions: A Social Science Reader, ed. by Monica Greco and Paul Stenner (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 434-438 (p. 435).
field of ethics in philosophy. Some would even argue that ‘the field of ethics is inevitably reactionary’ because it tries to think a pre-political world. What governs the postmodernist Zeitgeist is the idea that the key to the understanding of the contemporary world is the understanding of its political relations. Part of the reason why ethics sits so uncomfortably within postmodernism (and Bel and Lehmen’s work is drawing heavily on the very tenets of postmodernism such as the questioning of authorship, self-referentiality, irony and citationality) is because it seems to affirm an autonomous coherent subject who is above its economic-political circumstances and power relations, and whose choices, in order to be considered truly valid, must not be influenced by the contingency of everyday material conditions. The ‘proper’ ethical behaviour in the times before postmodernism must somehow evolve from self-awareness and self-reflection. Political relations are a challenge in so far as they need to be outgrown in order for the ethical dimension of Western metaphysics to arise. The main problem with the understanding of ethics before postmodernism is that the location of the ethical is one’s own subjectivity rather than ‘the diversity of voices and idioms that constitute political life’. Postmodernism with, for example, Michel Foucault, turns that relationship upside down, claiming that power relations and political life create and constitute subjectivity as we know it, rather than subjectivities constructing the social and the political life in relationships with each other.

At first sight, Hoghe is affirming this pre-postmodern understanding of ethics because his understanding of a subject is fixed – there is a clear understanding that his body is not like any other bodies, that what he can do and cannot do is unique to him. In interviews, he talks about collaborating with people with different personalities – that is what inspires him and attracts him. He started his career as a writer of people’s portraits – from celebrities to outcasts. He is fascinated by the personal and individual and his performances are full of reminiscences of ‘characters’: famous, or not so famous people whose existence is a historical fact. His ethics is based on the subject(ive), and socio-political

66 Ibid.
circumstances remain of secondary importance in his work. However, while he
does concentrate on the individual and the unique, he does not insist on the
subject’s autonomy and sovereignty. His individuality is based on the contact with
another human being – his body is socially constructed as another body only in
the contact with another, in the same way as other people’s bodies are ‘other’ to
him. And he prepares the stage for the transgression of the personal through the
emotions of love and compassion.

While Levinas also tries to question the idea of subjectivity, he does not do away
with the idea of subjectivity in order to replace it with the amorphous mass of
‘power relations’. His post-humanism is humanistic, or rather, he rejects both
humanism and anti-humanism. The rejection of humanism is based on his
rejection of the subject’s sovereignty, and the rejection of anti-humanism is
organised around the rejection of fragmentary and scattered identity, which is also
an irresponsible non-subject. What is challenging about Levinas is his profound
questioning of the autonomy of the subject whilst at the same time keeping the
subject as ‘single’ and ‘individual’ as a way of articulating the idea of individual
responsibility for the other. ‘One must show […] the very de-posing or de-
situation of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness,
and is thus the subjectivity of the subject’. 67 Levinas’ subject is constituted
through and in exposition to the Other, rather than being a pre-existent self before
the meeting with the Other. Levinas defines identity through the Other: ‘My very
uniqueness lies in my responsibility for the other; nobody can relieve me of this,
just as nobody can replace me at the moment of my death’. 68 Through an ethical
angle, Levinas is working on the reconstruction of subjectivity. Even though
Levinas thinks of the subject as dislocated and dispersed, s/he is still irreplaceable
and unique, and that uniqueness forms the basis of Levinas’ ethics in which
consciousness and intentionality are no longer privileged. The subject exists in its
exposure to the Other, and not in terms of freedom, intentionality, choice or
consciousness. Levinas’ problem is, on the other hand, that he is constituting the

67 Emmanuel Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The
68 Emmanuel Levinas, ‘Revelation in the Jewish tradition’ in The Levinas Reader, ed. by Seán
Other as absolute, in the search for the transcendence of the subject and subjective. Hoghe is offering another solution.

3.7 Conclusion
In this chapter I have argued for the importance of emotions as sentiments in the work of Raimund Hoghe. Indeed they are the very building blocks of his work. It is easy to overlook emotions as the fabric, texture of Hoghe’s work because the tradition of Western thought is not used to thinking or talking about emotions – they have always been underestimated as whimsical, something that needs to be overcome if one is to engage in a ‘serious’ analysis of the text. Emotions are easy to feel, but hard to describe and analyse. They have been mostly avoided as a theme in academic circles, and have only attracted multidisciplinary interest relatively recently – in the last 30 years or so. As Aaron Ben Ze’ev argues, ‘The major reason for the complexity of emotions is their great sensitivity to personal and contextual circumstances. The manner in which we conceive of a certain context or a certain person plays a crucial role in the generation of our emotions’. 69 And yet, there are certain paradigm scenarios that are easy to (mis)recognize: the suffering of a distorted body, furniture left behind and destroyed, images of holding, leaning and supporting, angel wings flapping, holding onto a bar until your hands slowly lose their grip, Schlager melodies. These (and numerous other moments in Hoghe’s work) form the basis for emotional response, which in turn, provides the binding mechanism for the performance. An emotional response is, however, functional: it is not a goal in itself in Hoghe’s performances. An emotional response enables the transgression of a misunderstanding so deeply rooted in human perception: that there is a fixed Other, another human being that is placed in that role by birth. Love and compassion enable the binding mechanism to function, and to bring this imagined Other back to the crowd of the Same. A fascinating mechanism is revealed in Hoghe’s performance, partly because it is reproduced through performance: first we have constructed one as the Other, then, we love one and feel compassion for one in order to minimize the distance between us. This is, nonetheless, not the end of the story. We are still left with the question from the beginning of the chapter.

What, then, can it mean, from a Freudian point of view, to say that we should or even can love others ‘for themselves’? Psychoanalytically speaking, the loved one is little more than a prop for a revival of at least two other (lost) love ones. The Lacanian view of love is a shifting, even a shifty one, but there is a fairly consistent reaffirmation of what he calls in *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* love’s ‘fundamentally narcissistic structure’. And there is this, from seminar 20, given in 1972 – 73, eight years after the Four Concepts: ‘love… never makes any one go out of himself’. 70

According to Leo Bersani, ‘the myth of love can become its truth only if we reinvent the relational possibilities of narcissism itself’. 71 Narcissism can be used as a force that transgresses itself – that is why he coined the idea of ‘impersonal narcissism’. Love is always, according to psychoanalysis, a case of narcissistic fascination, but how can this narcissism transgress the personal?

The soul that pursues ‘that which really is what it is’ is, then, not pure lack, and empty desiring receptacle; it has a recognizable moral character. It is individualized not in the way that personalities are, to our modern psychological understanding, individualized. Rather, it has what might be thought of as a general, universal, individuation. The lover seeks to make the lover like himself, but this has nothing to do with the specularity of a personal narcissism. He chooses a boy who already belongs to the lover’s type of being; and then, as Socrates puts it, he pours into the boy’s soul more of the particular god’s ‘inspiration that made the lover choose him in the first place. That is, in making “every possible effort to draw [the boy they love] into being totally like themselves and the god to whom they are devoted”, lovers are at the same time attempting to make the boy more like himself. The lover narcissistically loves the image of his own universal individuation that he implants in the boy he loves, but he is implanting more of what his beloved is, more of the type of being they already share. Far from suppressing the other, the Socratic lover’s narcissism suppresses accidents of personality so that the loved one may more adequately mirror the universal singularity mythified in the figure of the god they both served.’ 72

In other words, what we love in others, is a soul that both is and is becoming, the ideal ego in another. Loving another is a way of finding an ideal self that equally

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71 Ibid., p. 76.
72 Ibid., p. 82.
belongs to the one who loves and to the one who is loved. Even though this love is narcissistic it is at the same time pure object-love (the love for the otherness of the other). Bersani calls this love impersonal narcissism because it does not deal with the notion of a ‘unique personality’ which defines modern notions of individualism and oppresses our culture. Bersani notes:

Remarkably, Plato’s *Phaedrus* breaks out of this field of knowability. Specifically, it undoes the opposition between the active lover and the passive loved one by instituting a kind of reciprocal self-recognition in which the very opposition between sameness and difference becomes irrelevant as a structuring category of being.73

It is that kind of love, I would posit, that Hoghe is arguing for, which promises a way out of the fixation on the category of Otherness.

To summarize my argument, Hoghe produces affect in a neutral way, without *demonstrating* affection on stage. Yet affects in his work are that which enables for the operation of the neutral to take place. His body, which is heavily involved in the production of affects is extraordinary; this allows the neutral to operate as a structural term bringing affects and ethics into a complex relation. According to Barthes, ‘The Neutral – my Neutral – can refer to intense, strong, unprecedented states. "To outplay the paradigm" is an ardent, burning activity’.74 Therefore, I would argue that it makes perfect sense that the idea of the neutral can be found in work so highly and so explicitly charged with emotions as is Hoghe’s. To position oneself in a relation with the (mis-constructed) Other, the way Hoghe does, allows for the transgression of that oppositional relation via impersonal narcissism which allows for the paradox: pure object love and self-love keep existing in an unresolvable tension, made meaningful by affects. Again, as with Lehmen and Deleuze’s singularity, what we love and accept in others is neither their petty particularity nor their general abstraction, but the tension between the two. In Hoghe’s dance theatre, emotions are a way of accessing understanding, of

opening up towards that which we perceive as different, and of transgressing the essentially narcissistic nature of love.

Lehmen’s interest in the ways of understanding social systems via Niklas Luhmann offers a way of transgressing the conventionally accepted focus on the individual as the main unit of the social system, advocating for the concept of singularity which baffles the opposition between the particular (the individual) and the general (the social). Hoghe on the other hand attempts at finding a way of transgressing the individual and the particular but via another individual and another particular (in a personal relationship of the one and the (misunderstood) Other) instead of via a social system as in Lehman or BADco.’s work. The neutral provides an ambiance, a state, an inclination and a predisposition to achieve that task.
CHAPTER 4

BADco.: Deleted Messages of Swarm Intelligence

4.1 Introduction
In contrast to the previous three chapters that were focused on individuality, singularity or the onstage relationship between two or more dancers, this chapter will explore the idea of the neutral in the context of larger group dynamics. The first chapter dealt with the work of Jérôme Bel and his authorial persona. The second engaged with the attempt to read Thomas Lehmen’s performance as a desire to perceive social relations in such a way that the emphasis is on relations and not on individuals who are relating. This consequently creates the paradoxical state of singularity: a state in-between particularity and generality. The third chapter examined the work of an individual being (Raimund Hoghe) who is attempting to transgress or dissolve his immediately perceptible, physical uniqueness (and separateness) from others in and through affects. Although the first chapter emphasizes the relationship between the individual author and the way his authorship is strengthened by the community that engages with the work, the fourth chapter differs in dealing explicitly with how group processes work. It will locate the idea of the neutral in the fact that there is no ‘invisible hand’ that deals with the way groups interact and communicate; in other words, that the interaction is immanent or inherent to the system. The idea of ‘emergence’ explores the fact that in complex dynamical systems, nobody really governs the way the interactions function; they are self-organized and structurally neutral. The complexity of the system emerges from a lower-level specification of the system. The Croatian company BADco. attempts to create such a system in their performance Deleted Messages (2004). Here, even though the initial input comes from the company, thanks to the interaction with the audience, the performance

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eventually starts operating ‘on its own’, without the organizing force of a singular authorial hand. In the following quote, James Kennedy and Russell C. Eberhart use the economy of a nation as an example of a complex system. On the level of system organization, I would posit that what they argue could be applied to the social interaction that the performance *Deleted Messages* encourages:

As a physical system, an economy consists of a great many independent pairwise interactions between people who offer services or goods and people who want them. The 18th-century Scottish economist Adam Smith proposed that there seems to be something like an ‘invisible hand’ guiding the whole process, and in fact it is the absence of an invisible hand that makes the system interesting to us. Somehow, though no person controls an economy, it evolves toward and maintains an equilibrium; it is a relatively stable stochastic process, not really predictable, but dependable. Prices and wages are consistent from place to place and over time. This does not mean they are the same everywhere, or at all times, but the differences are more or less consistent. The important point is that there is *no central control* [my italics]. The stability or consistency of an economy at the large scale emerges from the qualities of the very many person-to-person interactions that make it up.²

This question of management of authorial control over a production, and the pragmatics of creating of a system that, once its initial parameters have been defined, operates independently, and effectively develops into a complex structure, is further explored as a dramaturgical method of the performance. Furthermore, the existing system of the production *Deleted Messages* allows for each performance to be different to an extent that I will delineate in this chapter.

Although BADco., who will be the focus of this chapter are, according to the description on their website, ‘a collaborative performance collective’,³ I will not focus on their work *as a collective*. I am not interested in examining whether their work process is a collaborative one or not, or whether some of them are, or should be, credited as directors. Although this chapter is dealing with group dynamics, I will not reflect on the group dynamics of the actual company in the process of

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³ See their website [http://badoe.hr](http://badoe.hr), especially the description of the company on the page [http://badoe.hr/badoe/](http://badoe.hr/badoe/), paragraph 1 [accessed 10 June 2010].
creation. I am simply interested in the issue of how the group process in the staging of a 2004 performance of Deleted Messages operates. By group process I mean the interaction between the group of performers and the audience - an audience that is roaming around freely during the performance, affecting the performers with their movement and affected by them in return. What BADco. are interested in is the creation of the rules of what I refer to as a ‘soft interaction’, something that does not put the audience in the spotlight but allows them nevertheless to participate, not only in the sense in which the audience conventionally participates in every performance – i.e. by responding to it from their seats, but also with their bodies and the way their bodies move. They are interested in a mode of communication with the audience that shows a mutual influencing but one that takes place through a more ‘neutral’ light, rather than through exposure, manipulation or another type of forcefulness.

However, before I engage in this discussion, it is important to locate BADco. in terms of their interests, their aesthetics and their ideological position as a way of understanding of the performative tools and protocols they use.

4.2 Situating BADco.

BADco. is probably the best known Croatian performing arts company on the international arts circuit. Founded in 2000, by two dramaturges (Ivana Sajko and Goran Pristaš) and two dancers (Nikolina Pristaš [Bujas at the time] and Pravdan Devlahović), it gradually expanded into a larger company that now includes another two dancers and a philosopher. According to Croatian law, they were not allowed to give their legal company an English name, so they transformed the name BADco. into an acronym of Bezimeno Autorsko Drustvo (Nameless Author’s Society). This gesture of naming that itself un-names is reminiscent of the Duchampian teasing of paradox by placing a mass-produced object in a museum turning it into an art object (as with Fountain [1917]), or Magritte’s pipe in The Treachery of Images [1928-1929]). Today, the artistic core of the collective consists of Pravdan Devlahović (dancer), Ivana Ivković (dramaturg), Ana Kreitmeyer (dancer), Tomislav Medak (philosopher), Goran Sergej Pristaš (dramaturg), Nikolina Pristaš (dancer) and Zrinka Užbinec (dancer). To date, the company has created the following productions: Man.Chair (2000), 2tri4 (2001),
Diderot’s Nephew or Blood is Thicker than Water (2001), Solo Me (2002), RibCage (2002), Walk This Way (2003), Mass (for Election Day Silence) (2003), Deleted Messages (2004), Fleshdance (2004), memories are made of this…


Their first production, Man Chair was a choreographic re-interpretation of a historically and theatrically significant performance Man-Chair (1982) by Damir Bartol Indoš, one of the key Croatian performers of the 1980s. It was one of the rare examples of the recreation of a Croatian performance art past. In BADco.’s interpretation, the focus is on the relationship between the body and the object, and they attempted to expunge the theme of Indoš’s performance (the attempt to rehabilitate an autistic child) from their own version. The remnants of the theme remained in Indoš’s tortured movements, however this was the beginning of what has proved a consistent interest in BADco.’s work: the attempt to disturb the mechanisms of representation. Diderot’s Nephew or Blood is Thicker than Water (2001) based on the writings of Denis Diderot for the play on Socrates’ death which he never wrote, functioned as a structured improvisation based on the personal input from the performers Pravdan Devlahović, Aleksandra Janeva, Tomislav Medak, Nikolina Pristaš and Jelena Vukmirica. The performance was not trying to investigate the theme of Socrates’ death. This theme was rather used as a basis for the search for meaning in gesture. BADco. members refer to Diderot’s Nephew as ‘a serious dance buffoonery’, but it was in fact a juxtaposition of philosophical reflections and silly dance routines which comment on the nature of the theatre medium, the authority of the director and the discomfort of representation. Ribcage (2003), based on a stage play by Ivana Sajko, subsequently turned into a radio drama, and then transformed into a performance (the excerpts from the radio drama were used in the performance), tries, like all the company’s work, to avoid the possibility of its interpretation. It attempts to function as a performance machine which digests and spits out the

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4 Damir Bartol Indoš took part in BADco.’s version of his performance as well, together with Nikolina Pristaš and Pravdan Devlahović. It was a performance within a performance, his performance within their performance.
conceptual similarities between the war in Croatia and the war in Iraq. In *Deleted Messages* (2004), BADco’s first international co-production (performed in Poland, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Turkey, Serbia and Montenegro) which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter, the production’s attempt to delete its own message follows a similar pattern to the company’s 2006 work, *memories are made of this* which deals with memories, with the imagining of that which hasn’t even happened and yet, somehow, should be forgotten.

Most BADco. productions tend to utilise varied possible means of expression such as sound, words, music, images and movement. However, BADco. also makes dance performances in the more narrow sense of the term - those that predominately rely on movement. They attempt to produce work that is both intellectually complex and puzzling, and physically challenging for the performers. Their productions are constructed through the de-naturalization of movements and are directly trying to oppose the idea of dance as a flow of movement. The movements of the dancers in their performances are interrupted, broken and partially automatized because they are constantly trying to work against the natural inclinations of the body, even against their own training as dancers. This is evident in works such as 2 (2001), a dance experiment of sensorial deprivation (Nikolina Pristaš and Jelena Vukmirica are dancing blindfolded), which earned Nikolina Pristaš the Hooge Huysen Award for young choreographical talents as part of the Aerowaves competition in London in 2002.

BADco. are not only involved in making performances. They are also engaged in various (activist) hybrid forms such as educational projects - *Watt+Eau* (2002) - and public protest - *Protest* (2006). They also created (with the help of computer programmers) *Whatever DVD* (2007) and *Whatever Dance Toolbox* (2008), technological tools that allow for the archiving and generating of dance materials.

BADco. are, in short, an experimental company, a company that are not interested primarily in thematizing particular issues or representing events through the medium of theatre. Their focus is, on the contrary, on the investigation of the protocols of performing and on the problematization of communication structures
in performances. They are verbally an extremely sophisticated company, and have
developed a particular type of discourse around their work characterized by the
use of highly abstract notions to describe what they are doing. They refuse to
engage with the elaboration of their performances on the level of what they are
‘about’. BADco. performances are dense: literally packed with theories, concepts,
quotations and graphical representations. For instance, their last production
League of Time (2009), combines a Fordist mechanics of production,
subjectivation as a consequence of the perception of an objective social time, the
beginnings of film art and industry, slapstick comedy routines, Laban’s research
on body mechanics, futurist projections of Soviet visionaries and Mayakovsky’s
poem ‘Flying worker’ on the final battle between the bourgeois USA and Soviet
Russia in 2125. It is hard to write about them without at least partially adopting
their own abstract and sometimes vague discourse about their work. This
bombarding of the audience with disparate concepts, often provokes a reaction
from the critics who struggle to write about their work. BADco. are sometimes
accused of attempting to be ‘too smart’. Nataša Govedić, a well-known Croatian
theatre critic, writes that

Seeing new productions of BADco., year after year, I wonder whether
novum can become a purpose in itself, whether it can transform into a
technicist ideal, similar to a demonstration of pure skill or deliberate
avoidance of transparency in order to enhance the ‘untouchable’ aspect of
the work. [...] the audience rightly expects the performance to address it,
rather than ignore it or ceaselessly underline how the understanding of the
performance is available only to ‘the chosen ones’, that is – to the
performers of the show.5

The previous quotation is problematic, because it assumes that the performers and
makers hold the key to the interpretation of their work, and this brings us back to
a well known, but also somewhat restraining, interpretative situation: the authors
of the performance code the message, and we, as interpreters, decode it. The
message is there, and, ideally, it should travel from the one who conceived it, to

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5 Nataša Govedić, ‘O čemu se u ovoj BADcompany ne govori?’ (What is BADco. not talking
about?) [my translation], Zarez (30 November 2006), the article can be accessed here
the one who was meant to receive it. However, Nataša Govedić is well aware that to end here would be short-sighted, so she continues, providing a more balanced view of the situation

It is interesting that Pristaš’s directorial specificity includes a paradoxical situation of playing for others, but with a programmatic hostility to the eventual sharing of meaning. That is the novum: rather than playing a joint game, we have been pushed into a situation of fragmented, heterogeneous and deliberately dispersed and partial meaning, which includes the way in which scenic space is used (in decomposition controlled by the performers), and pronounced and graphically reproduced text (fragments of the text are multiplying and changing [...] On the one hand, this type of strategy leads to an interesting ‘dehierarchization’ of meaning, to the dissipated performance – a puzzle that could be interpreted according to one’s discretion. On the other hand, many audience members that I have spoken with after the performance witnessed the superficiality of this kind of approach (everything is possible, but no one is responsible for anything), the forcing of formal characteristics of the performance, which entertain them during the performance, but later they feel as if they have ‘played a computer game’ [...]  

The quotation demonstrates that Nataša Govedić attempted both to consider different sides of the perception of the performance – as indicated by the ‘interesting “dehierarchization” of meaning’, ‘dissipated performance-puzzle’ vs. ‘superficiality (everything is possible, but no one is responsible for anything)’, and to point to the opportunities that this type of dramaturgy holds. Nevertheless, the emphasis is still strong on frustration and disappointment with the performance. This is, I would argue, the result of failed expectations related to the idea of what theatre is supposed to provide for its audiences. For some reason, it should not make them feel as if they had ‘played a computer game’. I would like to rethink her first sentence which argues that the director of the performance, Goran Pristaš, is systematically unwilling to share the meaning – as if meaning is a singular, containable entity. It seems to me that this type of approach is simply not functional for this kind of performance. It is of course, a legitimate position,

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6 According to the excellent dance analyses based on semiotics developed by Susan Leigh Foster in her works such as Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

7 Nataša Govedić, ‘O čemu se u ovoj BADcompany ne govori?’, Zarez (30 November 2006), the article can be accessed here http://www.zarez.hr/193/kazaliste1.htm [accessed 18 June 2010].
but one that does not try to access the performance on its own terms, and instead applies interpretative techniques which are not operable. Pristaš is not the master key holder, and the position of the audience in BADco.’s performances requires emancipation from the perception that what needs to happen is a decoding of what Pristaš is coding. The frustration that comes with failed expectations is a strategy for the production of BADco.’s work.

Bojana Cvejić, a performing arts theoretician and philosopher, who occasionally writes about BADco’s work, holds a diametrically opposed view of the production to that of Nataša Govedić. Cvejić argues that BADco. are engaged with the economy of reception: they try to liberate the work from the ‘restricted economy’ of artistic perception and consumption. In her text ‘The Accursed Share: Accounting for the Open’, Cvejić elaborates what she means by the restricted economy of an art work:

A work has to be interpretable, constituting meaning in order to be ‘about’ something, a credit of affirmed sense to support the artwork’s status. The restriction already begins with the Dantonian analytic assumption: nothing is an artwork without an interpretation that constitutes it as such and what is necessarily meant by this is that the form of the work is that rearranged and manipulated portion of the material that the interpretation picks out.

Cvejić is interested in breaking free from the restricted economy defined above, and finds BADco’s work (like that of Xavier Le Roy and Tino Sehgal), to be engaged precisely with this concept. In the work of BADco., according to Cvejić, ‘What it is ‘about’ or what it departs from is endlessly deferred or metonymically substituted’. Cvejić argues that BADco. are also not ‘staging theory’, and to accuse them of this is another way of dismissing those performances that ‘try to be too clever’ or those performances that are trying to avoid representation.

According to Cvejić, ‘staging theory’ would, again, close the work of BADco. into the same restrictive economy, where the performance would be representative of ‘a theory’ or ‘a concept’:

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8 Bojana Cvejić, ‘The Accursed Share: Accounting for the open’
http://www.insituproductions.net/eng/frameset.html, [accessed on 9 June 2010].

9 Bojana Cvejić, ‘The Accursed Share: Accounting for the open’,
http://www.insituproductions.net/eng/frameset.html [accessed on 9 June 2010].
But to consider the matter of ‘staging theory’, even if the interpretative viewpoint is hypothesized from a pragmatist distance, and thus insists on the performative act of attributing a "seeing" to the work, means to come to terms with the fact that theory pronounced so as to occupy the vacancy of traditional mimetic economy of representation in performance disavows its own postulation. If the viewer feels a connaissance [if the viewer recognizes the work, feels the connection] with the work on the basis of a theoretical paradigm, like the twisted up-side-down configuration of the body Le Roy demonstrates (from Self-Unfinished quoted in Product of Circumstances) which may be aligned with the Deleuzian concept of body without organs, and produces it into a savoir about the work (e.g. "Self-Unfinished stages BwO" [body without organs]), one is performing an injurious act of discourse, equivalent to reducing the work to a precedence of authorial intentionality which makes performance only representational to its concept. Furthermore, in explicating and assigning what remains in a theoretical atmosphere to the work, it is reversed to operate within that which it formerly escaped — a restricted economy.10

In other words, if we refuse to understand a performance as that which always represents something other than itself (for instance, a feminist struggle for women’s emancipation, the rise of violence in the society, the problem of ‘coming-out’, a break-down in communication between a couple etc.) then we also cannot say that it represents some sort of theoretical proposition, because that means we still treat it as a representation: we still operate within the restricted economy of representation. It seems to me, though, that the way Cvejić is constructing the problem of the restricted economy is also problematic. To imagine that there could be a work that could or should avoid interpretation, or to be more precise, that there could be a way of perceiving the work completely free from the urge to interpret treats interpretation as some sort of a muzzle that restricts the work. BADco. are not ‘staging theory’, but neither can their stagings truly escape representation. What I find crucial in BADco.’s work is that it allows or enables the process of neutralization in the production of meaning – by diverting from representing into the area of association, an area that is more vague, more volatile and unpredictable. I would argue that their performances fail if they attempt to completely ‘escape the economy of representation’ because that would mean a complete disregard for the audience, who will also engage with the performance on the representational level. However, in arguing that their aim is

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more modest - a dissolution of a coherent picture, the provoking of an inconsistent interpretation of a performance work – I would posit that their work succeeds on these terms. On the other hand, even if one claims that their performance aims at escaping the economy of representation, there will always be a resistance point: the audience’s desire to interpret, and to treat the performance as representational to some extent. And perhaps in that point between the attempt to escape from the economy of representation and the inability to do so, lies my interest in BADco’s work. Their work is very challenging for the audience member trying to interpret it or write about it – and that challenge is part of the enjoyment that this type of work can provide.

So, on one hand, there is Nataša Govedić arguing that Pristaš refuses to share ‘the meaning’ with the audience, and on the other hand, Bojana Cvejić who believes that to force an interpretation on the work means that the audience is not allowing the work to emancipate itself from the restricted economy of representation.

What BADco. are doing relies a great deal on pushing forward the paradox of hedonism. According to philosopher Henry Sidgwick, who first defined it, ‘the fundamental paradox of hedonism’ is based on the idea that ‘the impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim’. On some levels, the aesthetics of BADco. are based on the idea that the pleasure from the performance will be created not through the direct act of enjoying the performance, but through a delay of pleasure, or postponement of pleasure, in order to provoke a different kind of pleasure, a cognitive pleasure in the process of trying to figure out what is going on. This latter type of pleasure does not want to exhaust itself in the act of ‘solving a puzzle’, so it refuses to formulate a promise that there is something going on which could be finally resolved, or fully articulated. If there was, there would be an end both to the process of perceiving and participating in the performance, and to BADco.’s attempt to leave that process open.

4.3 **Deleted Messages: beyond description**

The production that is particularly intriguing in this respect is *Deleted Messages* (2004) because it seems to me that it strikes the right balance between trying to resist the economy of representation (deleting the message) and providing enough opportunities for that economy to persist. Another captivating thing about this production is that it groups a significant number of issues that the contemporary theatre condition resonates with, such as: rhizomatic or viral dramaturgical logic, a greater emphasis on the ‘relational’ aspect of the work, proceduralism, an intensified usage of systems, notations and protocols for movement and textual generation, the specificities of group dynamics and social organisation (social software) and the problem of surveillance in contemporary society.

When I first saw the production, the audience, together with six performers, enter the performance space, a vast hall of a former tobacco factory.\(^{12}\) It is almost impossible to distinguish the performers from the audience, they move around just as the audience members do.\(^{13}\) The audience behaves as one would imagine of a group of people who have just entered a space they have never visited before: they timidly explore it, walk around to get a feel for it, not quite sure what is expected of them. The most noticeable thing is a white rectangle in the middle of the performance space made out of strips of white fleece cloth placed next to each other. Initially, people are reticent to step on the white rectangle, but since there is not much space left uncovered outside the white rectangle, a number of audience members begin one by one to step on it. Subsequently, according to the predictable flow of collective behaviour, others follow. What this performance allows, and this will soon become obvious, is for the audience to work together as a social system. It doesn’t strictly regulate the behaviour of the audience, but

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\(^{12}\) The following description is predominantly based on the premiere of this piece, on 24 July 2004 in Klaipeda, Lithuania as a part of SEAS festival. As well as being performed in abandoned factories, *Deleted Messages* has also been presented in theatres, with the audience on stage with the performers. It was even performed once in an empty pool during Confusion and Groove Sanctuary – a DJ / VJ crossover musical event as a part of Zagreb’s *Operation: City* in September 2005 aimed at trying to protect an abandoned industrial zone in the centre of the city from being sold to private investors - part of a larger struggle for the preservation of public spaces jeopardized by the workings of corporative capital.

\(^{13}\) Their clothes appear simple, tops and trousers in neutral colours such as white, black, dark blue and dark teal that don’t attract attention.
practices an exchange between the audience and the performers. A social system, according to Everett M. Rogers, is ‘a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal’.\(^{14}\) Those ‘units’ or, rather, members of social systems can be individuals, organizations, informal groups or even subsystems. What is important to note is that all audience members are working towards solving a common problem – in this case the problem is how to deal with this performance, or what is expected of the audience in relation to the performers. To be more precise, the goal is as follows: to move around the space in order to get the most out of a performance while not obstructing it. On the other hand, the goal of the performers is to develop the communication and the exchange with the audience so that the audience can recognize that the exchange that is being proposed is a soft exchange, where nothing specific is asked from them. In a way, what guarantees that there will be some understanding between the audience and the performers is the fact that they create a social system together. Due to the fact that social systems have a structure that enables the people involved to predict the behaviour of others with some sort of accuracy, there will be a way of moving around in the performance *Deleted Messages* – a way that is not pre-determined by performance makers but a way which will be negotiated during the performance itself, together with the audience.

Upon entering the space, the first impression is of a 'sterile', protected area that takes up most of the space, in glaring opposition to the narrow area that surrounds it: heavily dirty, with layers of dark grey-brown dust accumulated over years. The former tobacco factory has been transformed into a strange, unfamiliar space that creates a sensation of uncanniness. The impression of a clean 'sterile' space in the middle of the filth is not that striking if the performance is happening on the stage of a theatre. However, what is always visible is a subtle division of space: the inner, consecrated, protected space; and an outer, non-lit space, a space on and of the borders. This separation is due to the white fleece sheet on the floor. The audience walks over the fleece. Fleece is such a gentle and thin material – you realize how easily it tears once you step on it, but its compact whiteness is visually striking. There are also some chairs in the space but because there are so

few of them, it is not entirely clear that they are for audience use. The second point of space separation occurs in relation to the hollow, light aluminium sticks which hang on nylon cords from the ceiling around one metre above the floor, and which subtly divide the space. The third element of spatial division involves three big screens with projections that hang above the audience on three sides of the space, above the rectangle of white fleece. All these elements, though they create division, also at the same time communicate a failure to divide, because what we might call the 'sterile' space is by no means really protected from the non-sterile space – the air the audience breathes remains dangerously the same.

![Image 5. One of the three projection screens (the second one is on the left). Performance of Deleted Messages in a former tobacco factory in Klaipeda (Lithuania) on 24 July 2004. Photo by Bernd Uhlig.](image)

A projection on one of the screens remains the same throughout the performance. It is simply a real-time projection of what a fixed camera records during the performance. The projection is not, however, an image of the actual performing space with people moving around the way a human eye would see it. Instead it simply visualises the movement flows of the audience and performers using movement tracking software designed by Daniel Turing.
The second screen projection consists of a series of slides (images or text) that tackle the issues of illness, contagion, contamination, and quarantine. One of the texts, a public announcement from 1920s America, reads:

Influenza frequently complicated with pneumonia is prevalent at this time throughout America. This theatre is co-operating with the Department of Health. You must do the same. If you have a cold and are coughing and sneezing do not enter this theatre. Go home and go to bed until you are well. Coughing, sneezing or spitting will not be permitted in the theatre. In case you have to cough or sneeze, do so in your own handkerchief and if the coughing or sneezing persists leave the theatre at once. This theatre has agreed to co-operate with the Department of Health in disseminating the truth about influenza, and thus serve a great educational purpose. Help us to keep Chicago the healthiest city in the world. (John Dill Robertson, Commissioner of Health.)

Another slide shows a black and white photograph of a young male wearing a protective cloth over his mouth, while holding equipment for disinfection and decontamination. By introducing these images, the performance offers thematic and interpretative baits to its audience, which are at the same time clues for its
(viral) dramaturgical organisation. The performance deals with issues of contagion and quarantine, but it is not ‘about’ those issues.

In order to elaborate on the particular neutral affect that the space produces, I will now digress from a visual description of the performance into a description of the metaphorical dimensions of the use of space in the performance.

4.4 The neutrality of the space
The space that the audience enters into feels like a non-place, a transitory place on the way to a fixed location. Non-places, according to Marc Augé,\textsuperscript{15} are spaces like airports, hospitals or hotels. They are usually anonymous, and are organized in order to deal with people in relation to some of their specific needs, either as passengers, hotel guests or sick individuals that need help. They are transitional, they serve as temporary meeting places for people who are passing by, and they don’t belong to anyone in particular. They are nobody’s spaces, but spaces where people pass through for this or that reason on the way to a place, a spot with a defined historical identity. According to Marc Augé,

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead these are listed, classified, promoted to the status of ‘places of memory’, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position. A world where people are born in the clinic and die in a hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to fester longevities); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing…\textsuperscript{16}

In non-places, different worlds collide with each other, usually just co-existing. Because a non-place has no distinct flavour of its own, it becomes ideal for the inscription of the places that people bring with them. Non-places can be confusing

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 78.
and unclear because they look similar to each other - this is why they provide explicit directions for the movement of human traffic. What is defined and regulated in non-places as an organisational structure is the dynamic of movement – non-places tell you, clearly, with obvious signs and directions, where you need to go. They are textually or visually (pictograms, ideograms) organized. They can also evoke specific fictional spaces that are located in the imagination of a particular period, rather than in the actuality of the period itself. These fictional spaces can also appear retro-futuristic, as a fantasy of the future, but a fantasy that is already dated. Unlike places, non-places are not concerned with identity or history. They exist in a vacuum and existence in these places is evanescent and ephemeral. One needs to go through them to arrive somewhere, or to do something. There is something immaterial about them, as if they don’t really count, like a no-man’s land. Whenever I go to the airport I feel as if whatever I do there, doesn’t count, because it is not any real place. It almost doesn’t count towards my life. I become invisible for everyone because I am not in the locality of a space. Even the money that gets spent there sometimes does not count, it appears somehow excused from the normative economies of our cultures – airports are tax-free for instance.

I would divide non-places into three categories. Firstly, spaces organized around travelling: airports, bus stations, train stations, ports, roads, hotels – spaces one needs to pass through in order to go somewhere else. Secondly, spaces connected with death, illness and birth: hospitals, clinics, sanatoriums, asylums. They are also transitional, but metaphorically transitional, or transitional in terms of life phases, rather than life spaces. Thirdly, fictional spaces as seen (for example) in sci-fi films. These spaces are historically recognizable, but their history is a fictional history, a history of a particular historical perception of what the future will look like. Those spaces have never really existed, but they are modelled or inspired by real life spaces and are usually a projection of a possible future world.

The space in Deleted Messages contains elements of all of these spaces and is categorically unclean. It invokes a quarantine through video projections, but it contains elements of a fictional space and a transitory space as well. All those spaces are also spaces of isolation and aloneness, they represent the danger of the
unknown or the excitement of the unknown, the potential for an adventure. These are spaces where something is meant to happen, but nobody is quite sure why. As Augé writes,

there survived something of the uncertain charm of the waste lands, the yards and building sites, the station platforms and waiting rooms where travellers break step, of all the chance meeting places where fugitive feelings occur of the possibility of continuing adventure, the feeling that all there is to do is to ‘see what happens’\textsuperscript{17}

Travelling is often perceived as a time of a potential danger: car crashes, airplane malfunctions, slippery roads, reduced vision. We usually say to the one who is leaving something along the lines of ‘have a safe trip’ but we never say to the one who is staying ‘have a safe stay’ as if stays are meant to be safe. And yet people are, statistically, at a greater danger of dying from an illness then they are of dying from a traffic accident.\textsuperscript{18} As for isolation, illness always operates as a socially isolating factor, even in the case of those illnesses that are ‘socially acceptable’ and do not pose a threat for the health of those around us, such as cancer.

4.5 The implications of quarantines

Physically, quarantines are not necessarily clean. They serve to isolate those inside from the others outside. They serve to protect those that are healthy from those that are ill, rather than to protect those that are ill. Quarantines are usually linked with epidemics at a concrete and specific historical moment. They are of interest to many disciplines because they have high social and political resonance and consequences. Their development structure is also very dramatic and burdened with feelings related to catharsis. Epidemics have a fixed structure: the time before the epidemic, the occurrence of several instances of the illness, confusion, the break-out of the illness, fear and paranoia, conflict and resolution – either in death or through survival.

\textsuperscript{17} Marc Augé, \textit{Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity} (London and New York: Verso, 1995), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{18} According to World Health Organisation Mortality Database, in 2006 in the United Kingdom, out of the total of 572224 deaths, only 3522 deaths were due to travel accidents. See http://apps.who.int/whosis/database/mort/table1_process.cfm [accessed 13 June 2010].
If we look at quarantine as part of the typical progression of an epidemic, we begin to appreciate a number of impulses that often help shape it. These include (1) the social response of avoiding the ill, or those perceived to be ill, particularly if the disease is thought to be easily transmitted from person to person (i.e., contagious); (2) negotiations over how the epidemic disease in question is understood by both experts and the community at large, especially in terms of cause, prevention and amelioration; (3) the complex political, economic, and social battles that guide or obstruct a community’s quarantine efforts; and (4) the extent to which ethnicity and perceptions about a social group associated with a contagious disease frame the social responses of quarantine.19

There is something very cruel about the separation required in a quarantine. The concept of the quarantine is thus ideally placed to frame this performance in because firstly, there is a viral logic to the performance – performers get the virus that allows for movement from the audience. In addition, the social dynamic within the performance is activated: there is a sense of isolation from the outer world because it feels as if you have stepped into a space which operates on its own rules, and you are unsure of what those rules are and yet you have to behave as if you do because you are the part of the performance and not just sitting safely in the audience. There is a sense of loneliness, also as a result of insecurity of what it is that you are doing there. You might be afraid that the others ‘get it’ and that you are the only one who does not. So you fixate on others to help you get through – you watch their every move. Everybody is trying to see what everybody else is doing, asking themselves: ‘Is it okay to step on the white rectangular carpet-like white area?’ – ‘The guy next to me did it. Looks like it is okay, let me do that too.’ Furthermore, there is a sense that the following needs to be ‘understood’: how the illness functions, what are its codes, how it spreads, how to control it, how to move around the space to let the performance happen. There is also a sense of unfulfilled expectations in the performance – the sense that the code is disintegrating as you are trying to understand it. The space somehow seems excluded from the everyday economy of exchange. As such, another economy should be re-established, and yet, any type of social organisation will happen according to the knowledge and practice of social organisation that we have adopted as social beings.

4.6 Self-structuring dramaturgy: systems, parameters and protocols

The performance space where *Deleted Messages* takes place is monitored and subjected to camera surveillance. There is a sense that we are being watched and yet it seems nobody is doing the watching. The camera simply records and projects the audience members’ movements onto the screen for us all to see.

Among the mentioned lines of spatial division in the production, one highly conventional division is missing: there seems to be a lack of any spatial division between audience and performers.20 Some time after the audience and performers have entered the space, the performers start to move following the logic of the (Excel) spreadsheet table projected on one of the three screens, and directly as a result of shouting each other’s name and parameter number (for instance, P4 for Pravdan Devlahović and his fourth parameter). Parameters are the dancers’ physical answers to very simple questions: What are you doing? (type of movement); How are you doing it? (manner); Where are you doing it? (place); What image influences your movement? (image) and In relation to what? (relation [towards people and objects in space]). The movements might be, for instance, in the same order: ‘running’, ‘very slowly’, ‘as far as you can from the floor’, ‘a tree falling’ and ‘next to the left hand of the person standing closest to you’. Each performer presents his own 5 parameters by performing them, first separately from each other, one at the time, after his or her initial and the number of parameter are called by another performer. Once the parameter is called, the box in the Excel sheet with that parameter changes colour, so that the parameters are not repeated (the order in which the parameters are called is random, thus different from one performance to another). After their names are called, the performers approach the table with CDs, set up their own music (each parameter has its corresponding sound) and place themselves under the screen with the spreadsheet projection to perform the parameter. It is not entirely possible to read from the performers’ movements the method used to generate these (though there are, as I will argue, very strong indications that the performers are moving

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20 The number of the audience is dictated by the particularities of the performance space: ideally, according to the director’s concept there should be three people per square metre. This number is formulated around the suggestion that the recommended maximum density of crowd or the safety limit in the Safety Guides (see [http://www.crowddynamics.com/index.htm](http://www.crowddynamics.com/index.htm) [accessed 28 June 2007]) is 40 people per 10 square metres.
According to a system, so the audience has to resort to other sources – documents presented as a part of a DVD of the performance.  

Image 7: The CD players, each bearing the initial of one performer. Performance of Deleted Messages in a former tobacco factory in Klaipeda (Lithuania) on 24 July 2004. Photo by Bernd Uhlig.

The performed material is generated by using and further developing the analytic system called Funktionen by Thomas Lehmen, whose work I analysed in chapter two of this thesis. As I discussed, Lehmen uses a variation of this system in the performance Schreibstück, covered on pp. 120-121. It is intriguing to see how this system has developed from one production to the other, or to be more precise, it is not so much that the system has changed as much as that its usage and contextualization has changed in the move from Lehmen to BADco. In Deleted

BADco. made a DVD of this production which follows the dramaturgical logic of the performance. The DVD contains 4 one-shot videos of the piece, recorded from four different camera positions. The viewer is the editor: he or she chooses the editing strategy or simply randomly changes from one video to the next. The DVD also contains extra material which includes: a statement by the director Goran Sergei Pristaš and the dramaturge Ivana Ivković that is basically an interpretative description of the piece (not unlike the one I am writing here except that it is more condensed), a quote by Gilles Deleuze and the explanation of the generation of movement with an accompanying drawing of the chart (Excel sheet).

For more on Thomas Lemen’s Funktionen go to http://www.thomaslehmen.de/seiten/03_funktionen.htm [accessed 27 February 2007].
Messages, each performer deals with five choreographic elements that in a way identify him or her, or belong to each of them in a way. The accompanying DVD text talks about these elements as if they are some sort of performers’ genetic code, which fits well with the overall flavour of the production, but might also be problematic in its essentialist connotations: what performers ‘have’ is a behavioural strategy, not a fixed genetic code. The performers demonstrate their presence in space through exercising their specific parameter combination, and during the development of each performance, the parameters get erased under the influence of the audience’s movement: the performers get contaminated by the virus of the audience’s movements. As you can imagine, some directions are easy to recognize, while a number can even contradict each other. While the performers intensely try to fulfil their task, and its particular combination of movements, the chance of somebody in the audience actually recognizing the image of ‘a falling tree’ is so minimal that we could safely say it is impossible. This direction to the performer is read by the audience simply as a combination of movements, certainly not as a representation of a falling tree, with all the connotations that this might bring. But the effect that this system of movement produces on the audience is the feeling that there is a system, even though it is hard to see what it is at this point. That places the focus on the idea of the ‘systemness’ of the system, rather than on what the system actually is.

23 Yet again, bearing in mind current advancements in genetics, a genetic code might not be a fixed thing in future perception at all.
After each dancer\textsuperscript{24} has danced his ‘code’ (each of his five parameters) or more precisely, performed a sequence of movements that identify him or her, and the starting position for all of them is right under one projection screen, the performers continue to move around in the audience. At that point, they are putting together their own solo, constantly adding other dancer’s parameters to the ones they already have, until they create a certain movement monster. At this point it becomes almost impossible for them to physically articulate all this information (each performer has 5 parameters and there are 6 performers in the space, meaning that each solo ends up trying to articulate in movement 30 different demands and an enormous number of combinations at one time). When the second solo part finishes, the phase of contagion spreads further. Performers start continuously exchanging elements of different categories or movement parameters. Some of the parameters get ‘lost’ or are dropped in the contact between the performers because another parameter ‘prevails’. The audience can

\textsuperscript{24} The performers in \textit{Deleted Messages} are Pravdan Devlahović, Nikolina Pristaš, Goran Sergej Pristaš, Ana Kreitmeyer, Ivana Ivković, Tomislav Medak and Darija Doždor, who left the company in 2005.
simultaneously observe the exchange of parameters on the spreadsheet that is projected and wander around the space in search of the performers and the performance itself.

4.7 Viral dramaturgy

The way that the dramaturgy of the production functions is twofold. On one hand, it replicates a social system. There are initial movement parameters that are performed by the performers, but the way that their choreography develops is the result of the interaction with the audience and of the contact with the other performers. The initial elements grow more and more complex, according to the input from the audience, and according to the contact between performers.

The second organisational moment of the dramaturgy of the performance is the grouping of motives and themes. Rather than having a metaphorical dramatic structure, where there is a narrative to be told or performed, this production relies primarily on a metonymical dramatic structure. So, it groups the themes, according to their physical proximity – where there are quarantines, there will be an epidemic, and a virus. Metaphor is, nevertheless, important in this dramaturgical logic because the virus from the quarantines is present in the way the movement is generated – the dancers are ‘infected’ by the audience’s movement and by each other’s movement and they also transfer the movement onto one another.

The performance moves across several clusters of meaning, all of which are connected or connectable. The idea of a virus can easily be linked with the idea of quarantine,\(^ {25} \) and both of them can be linked with the issues of group dynamics or

\(^ {25} \) The idea of a quarantine came about as a result of the fact that this production developed in the framework of a pan-European The SEAS project whose thematic focus was on harbours, seas and travelling. SEAS project was a long term project initiated by a Swedish production company Intercult in collaboration with numerous partners (both production companies and artists) around Europe. Its aim was a cross-cultural collaboration that sought to bring together artists from those countries on the edge of Europe that do not have a long or prominent history of collaboration, such as Balkan and Baltic countries. The project has had three phases so far: 2004-2005 was the Baltic-Adriatic phase, 2007-2009 was the Black Sea–North Sea phase and 2010 Istanbul-Batumi, the final SEAS X phase. For more information on the project, please check Intercult’s web page [http://www.intercult.se/projects/](http://www.intercult.se/projects/). BADco. took part in all three phases of the project. It is interesting that the performance Deleted Messages is, in itself, a part of a larger system, a system of numerous performances and exchanges happening under the umbrella of the SEAS project. The
crowd dynamics. So, to give a résumé: these clusters of meaning involve notions of:

Virus (biological virus but also computer virus)
Spam
Genetics
Quarantine
Group dynamics
Games
Combinatorics

Those focal points bring together the plane of immediacy (concrete realities) and the plane of deferral (abstract realities) in one continuous syntagm, recruiting and re-combining possible streams of signification. The dramaturgical organisation of the piece re-enacts its thematics or to put it differently, the performance does what it speaks of. Or to put it even more differently, the performance does not speak, it does.

The word ‘virus’ - it is often the case with names and naming that they remain fossilised in the time and space of their initial meaning - does not do justice to the concept of virus and the way it is re-created in the philosophical thought of today. It simply means poison, and (understandably) reflects only its destructive effects on the human race, but does not indicate its fascinating mechanism. The main characteristics of both the computer virus and the biological virus are that they can reproduce themselves without either knowledge or permission of the

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26 The process of combining actions and procedures in accordance with certain constraints.
27 It is not entirely appropriate to use this word, because virus, in fact, does not fossilise well.
28 I mean here primarily the concept of virus as described in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: ‘Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the cellular gene of a complex species: moreover, it can take flight, move into the cells of an entirely different species, but not without bringing with it “genetic information” from the first host (for example, Benveniste and Todaro’s current research on atye C virus, with its double connection to baboon DNA and the DNA of certain kinds of domestic cats.) Evolutionary schemas would no longer follow models of arborescent descent going from the least to the most differentiated, but instead a rhizome operating immediately in the heterogeneous and jumping from one already differentiated line to another’ (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 11.
users (in the case of the computer virus) or their hosts (in the case of the biological virus). This is visible in *Deleted Messages*, when the movement of the audience is integrated without the approval of the audience – sometimes the audience doesn’t even notice that they have ‘transmitted’ the ‘virus of movement’. 29 Also, a virus is a content-empty, hollow unit that can only replicate itself by infecting a host cell – viruses can only *perform* their ‘nature’, they cannot simply ‘be’, because there is nothing to be. They have no content, they ‘are’ mechanics and movement. In case of the biological virus, the debate between virologists with regard to the status of its existence, 30 whether it can be considered living organism or non-living unit, is still ongoing and deeply disturbing for established taxonomical structures. The way they spread and reproduce is best described as rhizomatic: ‘any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order.’ 31 What is also interesting about the way a virus operates, and is related to the problems of virus systematics in terms of whether a virus is alive or dead, is that ‘dead’ viruses can be brought back to life if they collaborate.

This is due to a well-established process known as multiplicity reactivation. If an individual cell is infected by more than one ‘dead’ virus, the multiple viral genomes can complement the damage and reassemble, by genetic recombination, to form a whole virus. This is group selection from the ‘dead’. It is exactly such a reassembly capacity that allows us to create artificial recombinant viruses in the laboratory. Viruses are the only known biological entities that have this capacity to animate their dead, a type of ‘phoenix’ phenotype. A dead (or defective) virus need not remain

29 Sometimes the performers imitate a member of the audience without them noticing it. They allow themselves to get infected by the movements of the audience wandering freely around the space.

30 See Edward Rybicki, ‘The Classification of Organisms at the Edge of Life, or Problems with Virus Systematics.’, *South African Journal of Science*, 86 (1990), 182–186. The following offers a beautiful description of the status of the virus: ‘A virus walks the line. Outside the cell, it’s just a package of biological molecules: DNA or RNA, and a capsule that contains them. It is no more alive than other small clumps of molecules. When it encounters an attractive cell, it sticks, and forces its DNA inside. This viral DNA enslaves the cell: the molecular machinery the cell normally uses to replicate itself – to make more life – is forced instead to make more virus. So, outside the cell, the virus is dead. Inside the cell the virus becomes an integral part of something living. What then is a virus? Not-alive? Potentially alive? Occasionally part-of-something-alive? Not-alive but able to control life? Something else?’ (Felice C. Frankel and George M. Whitesides, *No Small Matter: Science on the Nanoscale* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 79).

dead. Thus, neither the partial destruction of cellular metabolism nor its potential for life need preclude the ‘life’ potential of a virus.\textsuperscript{32}

In other words, more than one dead virus collaborates in order to form a whole virus – it is a group process and a group labour. Metaphorically speaking, the performance is brought to life only by the collaboration processes with the audience, only by a combined effort of all included. Viral logic (or at least a tendency towards it) is also clearly identifiable in the development of the performance – its structure is not arbitrary, but it is not arboreal either, meaning the positions are not fixed in a hierarchical way. Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović propose the term contingent, as the 1990s response to the adjective ‘arbitrary’ often used to describe dance practices in the 1960s.

The contingency of a specific proposition has nothing to do with the necessary, if necessary is that which by no means can be impossible, and it has nothing to do with the possible either, if the possible is something that is perhaps true. Contingency is based on the material effects of the conditionality, placement and materialization of a partial insight from a specific position in the given field. Contingent is something that is actually true, although it would be quite different under different conditions.\textsuperscript{33}

What Vujanović and Cvejić are trying to argue which is relevant for this piece is that, due to the way the dramaturgy is organised in \textit{Deleted Messages}, there is neither a place for the necessary, nor for the simply possible, but for something that lies between these two moments. The way that the performance develops is based on the idea of \textit{generation}: generation of the movement from a given task according to the input from the public. So, the way the performance develops is, to a great extent, contingent.

The concept of contingency has been borrowed from the critique of causal logic, as a category that cross-breeds the possible-arbitrary and the motivated-unnecessary. Despite this, our point of view is still determined by rational (although) non-essentialism which resolves the issue of arbitrariness using the concept of contingency or non-linear causality.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{33} Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović, ‘Open Work. Does it deserve a theory today?’ \textit{Maska} 20:5/6, 13-23 (p. 21).
\textsuperscript{34} Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović, ‘Open Work. Does it Deserve a Theory Today?’ \textit{Maska}, 20:5/6 (2005), 13-23 (p. 15).
4.8 Between the performers and the audience

In addition to the exchange of parameters between the performers, there is the exchange of movements with the audience. Indeed, what happens beyond and after we have witnessed this initial set-up of movements, what develops in the process of interaction is far more fascinating to watch. The most striking moments of performance happen in the points of contact, both of two or more performers with each other and of performers with the audience. One such example occurs when two performers, Ana Kreitmeyer and Darija Doždor lie on the floor wrapped in a large piece of transparent nylon, moving and talking under it. This image is very strong because it immediately and physically invokes (and juxtaposes) the feeling of suffocation while the nylon creeps around their faces, the moments of exchange of breathing and the inability to breathe. It also evokes the spread of contagion under the nylon fabric that prevents airing, yet does not provide the safety of a vacuum space. Quite the contrary, it allows germs to spread in that damp, warm environment. Their breath condenses on the insides of the nylon, reminding the audience that it is only organic matter that lies and moves beneath the nylon, two pieces of flesh that inhale and exhale to stay alive. Seeing the image, I am reminded of a piece of meat protected under a thin layer of plastic wrap in the fridge, tiny drops of fluid grouped under plastic; and of that same piece of meat couple of weeks later when it transforms under the influence of biological processes.
Another intense moment happens between Pravdan Devlahović and Tomislav Medak, in which Tomislav Medak also gets trapped under the nylon. He is walking forward, slowly, in order to escape from the nylon but, in the attempt to get rid of it, he steps on it, and as a consequence the nylon tightens over his forehead, squashing it painfully. The result is an immediate deformation of his face. These tiny fleeting moments are not ‘necessary moments’ of the performance, sometimes they don’t happen the way they are described here, sometimes the nylon is not so tightly stretched over dancers’ heads, sometimes it slips smoothly and instantly. The results are never predictable.

There is a moment that happened to be caught on camera during the performance in Zagreb\textsuperscript{35} in which Nikolina Pristaš leans against one member of the audience, a young playwright Maja Sviben, who, unsure of what to do in this situation, alternates imitating Nikolina Pristaš with trying to ‘answer’ with her own set of movements. During this dance miniature happening somewhere in the space - theoretically for everyone to see, but practically only followed by those who

\textsuperscript{35}This performance took place in Zagreb Youth Theatre (ZeKaeM), in May 2005.
happen to be around - both performers were especially attentive to each other. They appear deep in concentration, trying to negotiate a set of movements - Nikolina Pristaš performs with her particular movement protocol, yet might drop it in contact in exchange for the movement she ‘takes’ from the audience member.

At this same performance, when several audience members started spontaneously to follow Tomislav Medak, this resulted in a long human tail of people moving around the space that suddenly everybody seemed to want to join. The chain, nevertheless, disintegrated once the audience lost interest in that particular game.

The final set up of the production ends in a situation where the performers have been completely contaminated by the audience’s movement, and they drop all of their parameters. They merge with the audience in one body.

It is relatively easy to grasp, from the very beginning of the performance, what kind of interaction between audience and performers the production ‘asks for’ or ‘encourages’. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, in the interactions between the audience and the performers, the audience picks up relatively fast that they are not in the spotlight here, but also, that they need to participate to make the performance work. What is interesting however, is precisely this lack of absolute control on the part of the performers, and the way that the system and the audience included in the system takes over. Some members of the audience are inclined to think that if there are no visible borders, there are no borders whatsoever, and every reaction is welcomed. During one performance in Zagreb, one audience member, Maja Kovač, a performer herself, tied the shoelaces of one of the performers while they were in the middle of the performance, out of frustration for what she saw as a production which seemingly wants the audience to interact but actually highly controls the interaction process and requires a very particular reaction from the audience in order to function. This would obviously have never occurred if the performance was happening on stage – Maja Kovač would have certainly not climbed on stage to tie the shoelaces of the performer, yet in this situation she felt entirely uninhibited or even provoked to do so. This reaction tells us something about the production itself as well as its presumptions. Though it is open towards the contact with the audience, the production creates
the codes for the interaction, and proposes the parameters. Once the parameters are proposed and negotiated, the system, or other individuals in the system will take them forward: some will follow and some will stand in opposition to a lesser or greater degree. But what will happen will outgrow the initial propositions, and it will start a life of its own – like an epidemic. And yet, the epidemic will have its rules: some will die, some will live, there will be a pattern in its development - formative stages (build-up, pre-peak), epidemic peak, epidemic fade-out (or post-peak). Examining the audience’s behaviour during the production, some of them participate, and/or try to understand the rules, some attempt to sabotage the performance, or are completely disinterested and stop trying to take part in it after a while. The key is that this production allows for these differing behaviours. Let’s say you were watching Peter Brook’s *Hamlet* and someone jumped on stage and started messing with the performer’s clothes. This would be a significant rupture into the fabric of the performance, a disturbing act of violence towards the production. The production could not possibly accommodate this kind of behaviour. What Maja Kovač did in this performance, while disturbing, didn’t ‘break it’ because there was nothing to ‘break’ – there wasn’t another world represented, there wasn’t any other world but the world that was already there and the audience were part of it.

What I am trying to argue here is that the whole event took over from the initial set up. If we look at the performance in a traditional way, if the audience members don’t entirely ‘get’ the codes of contact the performance advocates, then on one level it could be argued, the production fails. However, it is precisely in those moments of misunderstanding or even in the deliberate breaking of the rules that something challenging happens. The performance embodies, rather than shows, the functioning of a social system – it provides an initial set up and then allows for a social system to function by itself, once the initial parameters are set in place. What Maja Kovač did was in a way an instance of anti-social behaviour, which is also not uncharacteristic in a social system, and the performer whose shoelaces got tangled was evidently very upset with her. Somehow, however, the

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performance, with its weak and subtle propositions of the rules of behaviour facilitated Maja Kovač’s action. Her frustration is, on one hand, understandable, provoked partly by what she perceived was hypocrisy on the part of the performers who gave her the impression that every type of reaction was welcomed. It would, nevertheless, be unfair to assume that the production promotes some false sense of equation between the audience and performers and encourages any kind of behaviour, while sanctioning it. The production encourages any kind of behaviour that could possibly happen in a social situation, but that does not mean that some types of behaviour are not more appropriate than others. This is, in effect, how human interaction and group dynamics functions. As the director of Deleted Messages, Goran Sergej Pristaš has stated in a 2006 interview, ‘theatre is of this world, it does not need to imitate it’, so those patterns of behaviour are there in the performance itself.

There is, however, one moment in which it becomes obvious that if you treat this production as a traditional piece of narrative proscenium-arch theatre, and only observe what is going on, the performance will suffer. I have seen ten performances of this piece and I have witnessed only once that the audience simply sat down and wouldn’t move. This turned out to be highly problematic because this performance profoundly depends on the movement of the audience. The audience in a way functions as a fuel for the production, as that which provokes both the verbal and physical material of the piece. Though the dancers have their own given set movements, they vary them in interaction with the audience. If the audience doesn’t move, the dancers rely only on the fixed material and on the exchange between each other. If they cannot ‘delete’ their material, if they cannot replace it with the movements of the audience, the performance is stuck.

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It is possible to argue that because the audience is moving around and not seated, this prevents them from seeing the totality of the performance. I would argue, however, that this is not an appropriate way to perceive the situation. It is not that they are missing the bigger picture, it is that the viewing position of this performance is at the level of interaction – so you see those that are close to you or that stand next to you, and if you want to see others, you have to move towards them, you have to achieve some level of physical closeness. This is not so much because of the closeness itself, but because if you are far from the performers, it is more likely that there will be people blocking the view. It is obvious that there cannot be any privileged position from which to observe the production because all positions are equally valid or equally invalid. In a way the best viewing position is the non-human position of the camera placed high above the ground. This does not discriminate or exert any kind of selection of data, but only records the information that comes into its field of vision. But this is also, at the same time, the worst viewing position because it completely misses the key element of this performance – the movement of the audience from within, the individual view.
with its dramaturgy of deliberate chance.\textsuperscript{38} It is difficult to disregard a strong feeling of ‘surveillance’ that the performance seems to take for granted. There is a certain sinister atmosphere that you are being watched at the same time as you are watching. The production offers a subtle control over what people see: it can never be that members of the audience see everything; everything is only seen and recorded by the neutral and disinterested eye of the camera.

4.9 Societies of control and group dynamics
This type of spatial organization and the emphasis on the idea of being observed invokes the Deleuzian claim that we have moved on from a disciplinary society depicted by Foucault to what he named the society of control.\textsuperscript{39} Disciplinary societies have been defined by their reliance on institutions such as family, prisons, factories, schools, courts, etc. to define their social fabric. In disciplinary societies,

the individual never ceases passing from one closed environment to another, each having its own laws: first the family; then school (‘you are no longer in your family’), then the barracks (‘you are no longer at school’); then the factory; from time to time the hospital; possibly the prison, the pre-eminent instance of the enclosed environment.\textsuperscript{40}

Theatre would also be one of those institutions in a disciplinary society, where the roles of the observer and the doer are fixed. These institutions are now in crisis as the society of control displaces the disciplinary society. This does not mean that they will stop existing, but that their decisive formative roles are gradually weakening: in other words, their roles are no longer prescriptive, but descriptive. Theatre is that place where people sit in the dark watching other people on stage, but in societies of control, that is only a description of what theatre can be, rather than a prescription of what theatre needs to be \textit{in order} to be called theatre. The grammar of disciplinary societies was defined primarily in terms of positions,

\textsuperscript{38} The notion of ‘the dramaturgy of deliberate chance’ stands for the fact that the system that the performance uses is highly coded and controlled, however, what the final results (or the prevailing parameters) might be is somewhat dependent on chance. The motto could be ‘ne corte nec fato’, neither chance nor fate, epitaph on the grave of professor William Rutherford, one of the first vivisectionists who performed his experiments on living organisms (Jon McKenzie, \textit{Perform or Else} [London: Routledge, 2001], pp. 236, 222).
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 3.
fixed points and identities. Societies of control, on the other hand, are focused more on mobility and anonymity, rather than on position and identity. The metaphor that best describes them is the complexity of cyberspace, with endlessly programmed and re-programmed movements of codes and information. Identities became contingent, flexible and mobile. This does not mean, however, that disciplinary deployments disappear. Although factory production, for instance, has declined in Western societies, it has been replaced by various types of flexible production that create mobile, anonymous networks of part-time work, illegal home labour and undeclared employment. These new societies are now labelled ‘societies of control’, and they indeed operate as such, where the question is how ‘free’ you are to intervene in the performance, and how well the audience’s movement is actually controlled by the way the performance is structured.

Societies of control produce the internalization of control – the rules are not entirely clear, but they should be somehow ‘sensed’ – you should know what you are meant to do. This results in a great potential for development and openness but also in a strong sense of pressure and frustration, embodied by Maja Kovač and her reaction. The internal contradiction, between the contingency of the performance, the possibility of the audience to influence it, and the pressure on the audience to figure out that which cannot be figured out because there is ultimately nothing definite or pre-determined to figure out, operates as the driving force of the production.

It is therefore important to observe that while Deleted Messages works on the development of a group dynamic - a set of propositions that would initiate the self-organization of the audience as a group - the space where the performance is happening is structured more as an exhibition (rather than a theatre) space. An exhibition space addresses the individual, whereas the theatre dispositif in its standard manifestations addresses the audience as a collective. Theatre shapes viewing so that everyone in the audience is presented with the same image at a

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41 The openness, or the lack of definite ending and closure, is also a characteristic of the societies of control. Deleuze says: ‘In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything – the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation’ (Gilles Deleuze, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’, October, 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7 (p. 4).
certain time – everyone present shares the same collective time and space which is the time and space of the performance. On the other hand, *Deleted Messages* encourages group work, collaboration and reliance on the other to show you the path – ‘Will he step on the fleece? Does that mean that I can too?’ So there are opposite forces at stake: the audience is broken into individuals, wandering around the performance on their own. They are, however, encouraged to operate in a group, to ‘listen’ and ‘perceive’ the behaviour of others as a part of a system that brings performers and audience together. If, however, any of them makes a mistake, or steps awkwardly in the path of the performer, or takes too much liberty, their personal sense of transgression or embarrassment might again individualize them, separate them from the group (it will make them feel as if others are watching them and laughing at them). There is a temporal distortion happening here as well - if you step out to powder your nose, in a conventional theatre production, you will miss a part of the piece. Missing something is not embedded into the production’s dramaturgy. Viewing an exhibition - and *Deleted Messages* on a certain level operates as an exhibition - however, does not require a shared time and space, and the order, even though it is usually set up by curators according to a certain logic, is not essential for the experience of an exhibition, neither as a set of pieces, nor as a whole. *Deleted Messages* is directed by space more than time: where you are in a given moment decides what it is that you will see, in contrast to the more time-locked logic of narrative based theatre performance. Unlike hypertext though, performance is time framed, and once you have missed a piece of it, this piece will not be performed again, you cannot go back to it and ‘follow another link’, but that which you have missed becomes a part of your performance.

4.10 Conclusion
At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Nataša Govedić articulating the frustration of the audience with BADco.’s work. Here is a different account of *Deleted Messages* by Swedish theatre critic Anna Ångström

Is this possible to review at all? With my presence, I constitute a part of *Deleted Messages*. The Croatian performing collective BADco. from
Zagreb loosens the boundaries not only between spectator and dancer, but lets our search for the self-deleting performance become ‘the performance’. About ourselves in the meeting with others. […] *Deleted Messages* reflects on crowd behaviour, system and adaptation, invisible borders and communication both physical and digital/virtual. […] The ensemble manages skilfully to balance this sensitive state so that we relax, smile, make eye contact. The strange becomes familiar and just when the process matures, the performance is over. […] The room is left full of warmth, but also of thoughts about how we adapt. The basis for BADco.’s work is both theoretical and conceptual; about art and democracy, about borders and the subtle codes we send and receive. But what makes *Deleted Messages* a somewhat utopian experience is the feeling of living here and now. Take responsibility.

A Lithuanian art critic Goda Giedraityte also found the attempt to delete the limits of narrative to be productive for the performance,

An intriguing solution of the director – to involve the audience in the area of performance imperceptibly – became a test not only for the spectators, but also for the authors. The project, its main aim – to delete the limits of narrative or subject theme – finally ‘deletes’ the essence of the performance: abolishes clear positions of separation between actors and viewers.

And this is probably the most intriguing proposition of *Deleted Messages* – the idea that it constantly erases its own traces, that it somehow doesn’t want to be caught. This is evident from the initial set up, where the audience is walking around, trying to get a feel of the space, through the movement codes that are displayed and then they modify according to the body positions, steps, and movements of the audience. The codes which move the performance, from Thomas Lehmen’s movement generation machine, are, again, the codes of the society of control.

In the societies of control, what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code - the code is a password, while on the other hand disciplinary societies are regulated by watchwords (as much from the point of view of integration as from that of resistance). The numerical


language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it.44

The introduction of the idea of a code is the performative equivalent of the importance of codes in the society of control. The performance comes in contact with, feeds itself on, or draws from the non-coded body of the audience trying to set up an exchange based on the rules which need to be negotiated in the process. It doesn’t represent the society of control, but performs it. It functions as a conceptual, performed response to a conceptually perceived situation – the concept of the society of control.

Deleted Messages functions as a virus spreading through interacting individuals, it demonstrates the basic principles of interactivity largely reliant on people’s behaviour. How the performers and the audience move will collectively change each performance and the performance space, not only from the beginning to the end (the fleece will become dirty and will tear at different parts, the thin aluminium sticks will fall, and so on), but also in relation to other performances of this production. The performers and the audience work together, and both individually and collectively they shape each performance. The situation in which they meet takes on a life of its own, as the performers and the audience spreads, extending beyond the performance itself, infiltrating private space and merging the boundaries of public and private space. However, there is a strong sense of the underlying control, the subtle and profound sense of censorship of movement, which starts to operate internally on the audience. As an audience member, you want to please, you want to do that which will be helpful for the performers, you don’t (generally) want to ruin their work. Or, you decide to do just that, as in the case of Maja Kovač, again, because you feel the pressure and you don’t like it. The virus or the dance code that was inserted in the performance is contagious, in the same way that human relations operate through subtle manipulation and persuasion.

There are three ways in which the idea of the neutral is present in this production. What is immediately perceptible, upon entering the space, is the visual blandness

44 Gilles Deleuze, ‘Postscript on the Societies of Control’, October, 59 (Winter 1992), 3-7 (p. 5).
of the performance: the white fleece on the floor, the grey walls of the former tobacco factory, the restrained tones of the performer’s clothing. There is a feeling of blandness on the level of the dynamics of the performance as well – no linear development towards a culmination, no building up of the situation, just a series of images and movements here and there. The dynamic changes, from the deep concentration at the beginning, where each dancer is ‘presenting’ their own dancing parameter, and the audience is grouped around the same space, to the more dispersed energetic levels when the action happens in various parts of the performance space at the same time, without any guidance provided for the audience regarding the choice of the action, movement or scene that they should focus on. But even though the dynamics changes, it is mostly similarly to a piece of nylon over the head of the performers: hushed, muted and faint, blurred faces and softened voices. Even when the movement is very elaborate, and the gestures performed with strength and determination, there is a sense of susurration which envelops the movement.

The second manifestation of the idea of the neutral, on a structural level, is the way the authorial position of the director and the dramaturge is replaced by a ‘dramaturgical machine’ that starts operating on its own. The influence of the authorial hand is neutralized, and the operations of a social system take over. The dramaturgical machine baffles the opposition of the audience and the performers, confuses the idea that they are posited ‘against’ each other, and instead, welcomes them on a neutral territory of mutual exchange and influence. However, the dramaturgical machine does not abolish the opposition between the audience and performers, because this opposition is precisely that which allows for the bafflement to happen. This of course, isn’t a perfect state of balance, because BADco. posited or launched the dramaturgical machine. However, the propositions for this dramaturgical machine are also, to a great extent, taken from Thomas Lehmen and adjusted, rather than constructed, by BADco. The performers become subjected to the same dramaturgical machine, which allows for a more equal exchange.\footnote{It is necessary to be careful with this idea of an equal exchange. I am not talking about an absolutely equal exchange; however, structurally, \textit{Deleted Messages} proposes an equal exchange in the same way that all citizens are, structurally, equal in the face of the law. That does not}
structure of the five questions\textsuperscript{46} as five dance parameters, he did not define the conditions of the exchange of movement with the audience. These conditions are negotiated during the performance, on a neutral ground that the performance attempts to establish. By comparison, the audience position in \textit{Deleted Messages} is neither similar to that of the audience in, for instance, Ivo Van Hove’s \textit{Roman Tragedies} (2007), nor to that of the audience in Felix Ruckert’s \textit{Secret Service} (2002). In \textit{Roman Tragedies}, the audience can climb on stage and sit there among the performers, but the actions of the audience have no consequence for the way the performance develops or for the movement of the performers. If an audience member is sitting where the performer was supposed to sit, the performer will politely ask him or her to move. If an audience member decides to disrupt the performance, his actions will be as disruptive as if it were to take place in Brook’s \textit{Hamlet}. In \textit{Secret Service}, on the other hand, the audience member has to agree to take off his clothes and to remain only in his underwear (women have to remove their bras). Such an invasive demand is already unacceptable for numerous audience members. If they refuse, they will be excluded from witnessing the performance. If they agree, what follows is almost a complete removal of agency from the audience member (they are being beaten and made to run in what seems to be a light version of a sadomasochistic orgy) in order for the interaction to happen. In comparison to these two examples, \textit{Deleted Messages} proposes what I see as a neutral interaction strategy.

Finally, also on a structural level, the neutral in \textit{Deleted Messages} manifests itself in the tension between the accidental and the predetermined, which makes the production function contingently. What BADco. attempted to engage with here is the creation of a structure that can operate on its own, once the process has been launched. They attempted to create a social structure that was ethically and aesthetically neutral. In it, the processes and contacts between the performers and the audience and their distribution in the space functions organically, as a cause and a consequence, and an action and reaction, rather than as a fulfilment of a predetermined aim, which is usually the case in an aesthetic object such as

\textsuperscript{46} See p. 198.
performance. There is a lot in the production which is pre-arranged: the ‘genetic’
dance codes of the performers, the duration, the duos of the performers, one scene
that includes all of the performers in a walking circle, and yet, the space and time
in between are contingent. What is neutral about contingency? Contingency is the
status of propositions that are neither true under every possible valuation (i.e.
tautologies), nor false under every possible valuation (i.e. contradictions). The
proposition which is contingent is neither necessarily true nor necessarily false. In
the contingent, the neutral thrives. Contingency is a logical state of neither-nor,
and is dependent on the factual input. And yet *Deleted Messages* deletes that
factual input, by denying being *about* anything other than itself, leaving the
dilemma between the truth of the performance and its lie unresolved.
CONCLUSION

We set the point of reversal, the end of the desert, the end of capital, in the intensity of the link that each manages to establish between what he or she lives and what he or she thinks. Against the partisans of existential liberalism, we refuse to view this as a private matter, an individual issue, a question of character. On the contrary, we start from the certainty that this link depends on the construction of shared worlds, on the sharing of effective means. (Marija Cetinić on Facebook, 23 November 2010)

It was my contention at the start of this doctoral research that one of the notions that had not yet been thoroughly addressed or theorized in the context of contemporary European dance theatre was the location, structure and effect of the concept of the neutral. In the thesis that has emerged from this contention, I have attempted to demonstrate and argue that the recognition and critical implementation of the idea of the neutral and its role in contemporary dance theatre can contribute towards an understanding and reading of choreographic strategies and oppositional relationships within the contemporary European dance theatres of Jérôme Bel, Thomas Lehmen, Raimund Hoghe and BADco. and, by extension, the work of a range of other contemporary artists in the field of dance theatre. The neutral, I argue, provides an umbrella term that covers a number of issues occurring in contemporary dance from the beginning of the 1990s onwards. This conclusion aims to bring together several treatments of the idea of the neutral that I have explored in this thesis.

Although the notion of the neutral has a long cultural history, it has a particular importance in dance theatre especially in relation to those works often referred to as ‘conceptual dance’ of 1990s and 2000s. The idea of the neutral, I argue, can provide a useful tool for the analysis and interpretation of these dance performances. What my thesis offers is a close and detailed reading of a select number of productions by Jérôme Bel, Thomas Lehmen, Raimund Hoghe and BADco. through a series of highly abstract concepts around the idea of the neutral.

I started from what I perceive as a particular social desire, a ‘structure of feeling’ or longing for the neutral in Croatia in the 1990s. In that respect the neutral is understood as that which resists the ec-centric politics of the Croatian government
during this highly conservative era and the *ab-normality* of the state of war that Croatia was then emerging from. The dominant artistic expression of the time was the kitsch, realistic and nationalistic art supported by the official government institutions. This social and political climate has greatly influenced my reading of the neutral, turning my reading of the neutral, following Roland Barthes, into the potential for benevolence and balance, and moving away from the loud, the aggressive and the imposing. In such a climate, Jérôme Bel’s performances were received as the anticipation of a different future.

In chapter one, on the work of Jérôme Bel, I establish the general paradox of the neutral. I have attempted to draw a line between the appearances of the neutral and its structural functioning, not, however, completely separating them from each other. In my view, the appearances of the neutral are trigger in the search for structural neutrality. An empty stage, blank facial expressions, naked bodies, and the minimal usage of stage props all point to the neutral as a mechanism of signification. I have been inspired by the key paradox of the neutral: the fact that the neutral is always *a pull*, rather than a fully-fledged notion. The neutral as a fixed definition does not really exist: there is no ‘essence’ of the neutral. It is a weak term that appears only in relation to other notions. Through my readings of the work of Jérôme Bel, I explored the neutral as the refusal to decide between two opposing positions, which is the most unstable position of the three and highly dependent on the other two. I explored the neutral as a state of being in limbo. The neutral position, undecided as it is, is not of the same ontological status as the other two. It is not an alternative to the other two, it refuses to define itself as either of the two, but doesn’t really articulate its position either, other than that it isn’t what the other two are. It is never fully present. It exists as a pull towards something, not as the thing itself. It is the position of baffling the opposites. This ontological instability of the neutral is particularly intriguing. I argued that the idea of the neutral has great potential in terms of the resistance to representation in dance theatre: it constantly underlines signification procedures and the discursive elements of the performance. The idea of the neutral discussed in chapter one is also explored as a way of escaping the mechanisms of signification, as an attempt to establish a non-signifying space. It turns out to be a
product and a result of those same signification mechanisms it attempts to escape. The neutral is a highly constructed notion.

Chapter two, on the work of Thomas Lehmen, explores the notion of the neutral from a different perspective. Lehmen uses a set of written movement instructions published as a book in order to create a performance, asking questions about the nature of choreography and the actual location of the performance. As a result of this strategy, which displaces the work from its actuality, Lehmen manages to achieve a particular sign construction that makes us look at the performers differently. I argued that the performers in Lehmen’s work manage to exist on stage in a particular ontological limbo, which is comparable to the state that Deleuze describes in his analysis of a passage from Dickens’ novel *Our Mutual Friend* – the state of singularity. They neither exist as concrete personalities, nor as representations of personalities, but as that existence which reflects humanity itself, as the *common* in all of us. This common, this mutual, this abstraction, allows for sentiments of compassion that are thoroughly explored in the chapter 3 on Raimund Hoghe. Although the first chapter recognizes the importance of the social structures and the relevance of the socially negotiated perception of art in the analysis of the work of Jérôme Bel, the real importance of the social, the mutual and the common, and is further anticipated in the treatment of Thomas Lehmen in the second chapter.

Chapter three, on Raimund Hoghe, argues for an area that dance scholarship has not significantly addressed to date: the importance of sentiments and emotions as the *structural* element of the work. This chapter on Hoghe allows me to show that abstract notions are not un-emotional and that emotions are not in opposition to concepts or to rationality. In this chapter, I argue that Hoghe is highly skilled in his ability to dramaturgically base his work on sentiments. I used current research on the philosophy of emotions to show how emotions are also rational, and how rationality is always emotional. The importance of nostalgia, rituals and Hoghe’s unusual body have already been recognized in his work, however it seems to me that all of these are, in fact, tactics for a strategy based on the activation of sentiments. At its basis lies the desire to hear the Other, to let the Other be and speak on his or hers own terms, allowing a space for such discourse to emerge.
The neutral is about relations but also about the possibility of a break through the entrapment of personhood, uniqueness, individuality or separation from the others. However, I argue that the very idea of the Other is misplaced, as we are, as humans, Other to existence itself. This precedes and, to a certain extent, annuls all other Otherness. The neutral in Hoghe’s work is located through Leo Bersani’s notion of ‘impersonal narcissism’ that tries to articulate of the paradox of loving: we love neither ourselves in the other person, nor the other person as just herself, but the space in-between.

The exploration of BADco.’s work in chapter four is somewhat anticipated in Niklas Luhmann’s social theory explored in chapter two, but here I dealt with another degree of the social – the invisible hand of social systems. I argued that the performance Deleted Messages strived to, eventually, establish a social situation in which whatever was occurring was happening according to the rules of regular social interaction, rather than as the result of an artistic intervention. The situation that Deleted Messages attempted to create was the situation of self-regulatory social relations. Deleted Messages played with the idea of a neutral dramaturgy – the dramaturgy that develops on its own once the parameters are set.

This thesis provides a means of analysis for those works that operate in the field of dance, but are not focused on kinaesthetic or virtuosic movement as the main articulation of dance as art. It also provides a way of analysing dance theatre performances using philosophical and sociological terminology. The neutral is a term in motion – how to dance with thoughts is not only a metaphorical idea, but a structural idea also. It offers an opportunity for the movement of an embodied thought, which is a complex thought that involves ideas, feelings and corporeality. This offers on the one hand, a conceptual location for the works I am analysing, but at the same time creates an ambivalent space, which does not to fix that location, but wants to allow for its ambiguity.

I would argue that the notion of the neutral is highly original in its complexity and

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possibilities for the thinking of nuances. I have been seduced by what I understand as the ‘inclusiveness’ of the notion of the neutral – the ability to endorse opposites as a way of understanding the world: the ability to stay in the paradox rather than to try to resolve it. In that sense, the notion of the neutral surpasses its concrete application, turning itself into a proposition on how to be, and how to act. Although in this thesis I have entirely analysed the neutral in the context of dance theatre, it seems to me that this notion has the potential to be taken outside of the confinement of dance studies in its disciplinary specificity, and to be treated as a model for a different social positioning.

The idea of the neutral has the potential to be applied beyond the field of the arts, as a proposition for a certain socio-cultural direction and the general ambience of the current times. This thesis opens up towards a certain correlation between different events, that exists between art and the wider social and political context. It is my view that they can be described through the notion of the neutral. The neutral inspires and encourages an ethical and ontological stance as an alternative to the notions of, for instance, the liminal, the absent and the transgressive which gained momentum in the analysis of minoritarian artistic (and cultural) production since the end of 1990s and in the 2000s. The term liminal is associated with the threshold, with the rites of passage, with transitional, with those extraordinary situations of spatial and temporal in-betweenness before or after certain fixed states or positions – it is a position which will eventually dissolve (unless a person resumes a potentially perpetual

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3 The key term in the analysis of the shift in contemporary dance in Gerald Siegmund’s book that I deal with in the introduction to this thesis (pp. 63-66), *Abwesenheit: Eine Performative Aesthetik des Tänzes* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2006).

state of liminality – as with priests or individuals standing ‘outside of the society’, but these are, again, extraordinary positions). Whilst the notions of the neutral and the liminal occasionally overlap because I also associate the neutral with in-betweenness (see p. 107), for the neutral, this in-betweenness is mostly nothing extravagant, daring or special – the neutral is the everyday. Also, for the neutral, this in-betweenness is a way of life, a way of experiencing the world rather than a transitional period towards somewhere else or an extravagant state of existence.

As for the absent, this term is an attempt at questioning the focus on the representation and presence, which are dominant modes of Western civilization, and an important term in Derrida’s project of questioning Western metaphysics.\(^5\) It is beyond the remit of this thesis to enter into the complexities and multiplicities of meanings of these terms here, but I would only like to emphasize one thing: all three terms (and I believe the term transgressive does not need further explication) emphasize the binary distinction, and fall on one side of it, trying to affirm that side of the opposition which is devalued.\(^6\) The neutral, *au contraire*, attempts to sabotage any opposition. The neutral is ordinary; it belongs to our daily conduct and our repetitive routines. It calls for the re-addressing of our everyday routine in order to raise awareness of how subtle and how effective small changes can be: the small change of refusing to take sides, the small change of acceptance of those whom we mistake for Others.

I used the term minoritarian above in the sense in which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari engage with it across a number of their works. According to *The Deleuze Dictionary*,

A minority is not defined by the paucity of its numbers but by its capacity to become or, in its subjective geography, to draw for itself lines of fluctuation that open up a gap and separate it from the axiom

\(^5\) Derrida’s project was, of course, inspired by Heidegger’s revision of metaphysics, where the notion of presence was located next to privileged terms of Western philosophy such as reality and truth.

\(^6\) Liminal positioned, for instance, against the normal, absence against presence, transgressional against conventional.
constituting a redundant majority. A majority is linked to a state of power and domination.\footnote{7 The Deleuze Dictionary, ed. by Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 164.}

Patrice Pavis makes the link from the concept of minority in literature towards a minority theory. According to Pavis

\[\text{[...]} \text{ all \[...\] criteria of minor literature can, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, be applied to a minor theory, which is all the more likely since this search for a minority theory is not based on criteria of the quality an superiority of the minority as opposed to an oppressive majority, but on the criterion of the marginality of research. Minor theory has difficulty remaining so, as if new majorities might ceaselessly aspire to universality and to take control over a general theory, to move from a minor to a dominant mode of explication.} \footnote{8 Patrice Pavis, \textit{Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture} (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 79}.\]

It seems to me that the neutral has an unexpected potential – it has the potential to become a dominant paradigm while remaining minoritarian. It confuses the binary opposition allowing for the conceptual entrance of the feeble into the powerful, but in such a way that the powerful keeps its weakness. The concept of the neutral has a strong political potential, which underpins my whole thesis. If read with a slightly different focus in mind, it is clear that the whole thesis explores the relationship between the individual and the social, the personal and the general, and attempts at advocating a position which would confuse these binaries. I am primarily interested in the way that an individual exists in the world, and to a certain level dance theatre is only a manifestation of that manner of existence. Or rather, a proposition on how that way of existing can be capitalised into a wider social and political programme.

The works that I have analysed provide almost a grading of this development – from the works of Jérôme Bel, who is still struggling to dismantle the authorial
structure, to Thomas Lehmen, who has found a way of transgressing the individual idiosyncrasies, but not abandoning them completely, to Raimund Hoghe who is then able to enter in the relationship with what he mistakes to be the Other, and finally ending with BADco., who have developed a system of mutual exchange between the audience and the performers. But what is common to all these works, is the general attitude that allows for the questioning of the paradigms of authorship, for the establishment of a choreographic system that does not block the personalized dancer’s idiosyncrasies, for the exchange of self-love for personal narcissism, and for the flexibility of the relationship between the audience and the performers. None of this could happen without the attitude, the ethical, ontological and political stance that they all share: the neutral. The neutral position has enabled an opening up towards all those possibilities that transgress our individual benefit and personal profit.

My future research will deal with those artistic works which problematize social relationships and social media, and I think that the thematizing of the neutral has prepared the terrain for this strand of investigation. In his influential 1962 study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* that was only translated to English in 1989, Jürgen Habermas argues that what defines the ‘public sphere’ is rational, critical debate and discussion. What is also important for the ‘public sphere’ is that it is

a sphere *between* [my italics] civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed […] In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler’s power was merely represented *before* the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people.  

The public sphere is the sphere of in-betweenness, but also a sphere of the neutral. One of its distinguishing features is that the public sphere is guided by the attempt

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to neutralize the speakers. That means that the status of the speakers is ignored or disregarded. According to Habermas, ‘they [public spaces: salons, coffee houses, Tischgesellschaften] preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether’.\(^{10}\) Habermas admits that this idea hasn’t actually been realized ‘in earnest in the coffee houses, the salons, and the societies; but as an idea it had become institutionalized and thereby stated as an objective claim. If not realized, it was at least consequential.’\(^{11}\)

Its second distinguishing feature is that the domain of the public sphere is the domain of the ‘common concern’, the questions that people share. The third feature is that of inclusivity – the public sphere is, in principle, inclusive. ‘The issues discussed became ‘general’ not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility – everyone had to be able to participate.’\(^{12}\)

It seems to me that the time has come to rethink this public sphere as the domain of the neutral and this thesis offers a mode of beginning to think through such a strategy.

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\(^{10}\) Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 36

\(^{11}\) Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 36

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