

**Gerald Siegmund**

**Entscheide dich:  
Rekonstruktion  
als Befund  
der Gegenwart**

*Make a decision:  
Reconstruction as  
an Indication  
of the Future*

**1. Der Historie verfallen?**

Rekonstruktion hat Konjunktur. Und das schon seit mehr als zehn Jahren.

Dass die 2. Biennale Tanzausbildung sich nun diesem komplexen und widersprüchlich Thema annimmt, scheint nur folgerichtig. Als sich Ende der 1990er Jahre junge Choreographen und Tänzer wie Thomas Plischke, Martin Nachbar, Jérôme Bel oder die französische Gruppe Le Quatuor Albrecht Knust mit wichtigen Positionen der Tanzgeschichte nicht mehr im Hörsaal, sondern auf der Bühne auseinanderzusetzen begannen, hat r das Phänomen als Endzeitphänomen gedeutet. Das Neue, über das sich der Tanz seit Moderne definiert hat, schien aufgebraucht. Vor der Zeitenwende des neuen Jahrtausend versichert sich der Tanz seiner eigenen Geschichte. Die Bewegung sei, von vielen Kommentatoren kurzsichtig beklagt, zum Stillstand gekommen, das Projekt Moderne erschüttert. Doch der Trend hat sich im neuen Jahrtausend sogar noch verstärkt. Von Endzeitstimme keine Spur. Mit der Vervielfältigung der Versuche, sich Positionen der Tanzgeschichte nähern, hat sich auch die Anzahl der Begriffe, die zur Beschreibung dieser Phänomene wendet werden, vervielfacht. Ist eine Einstudierung schon ein Rekonstruktion, Ballettkompanien daher schon per definitionem eine Sache der Vergangenheit? Was unterscheidet sie von der Wiederaufnahme oder gar von einem Reenactment?

Ziel dieses Textes ist es, Vorschläge zu machen, wie eine inhaltliche Unterscheidung zwischen den einzelnen Begriffen und Konzepten möglich wäre. Einstudierung, Wiederaufnahme, Reenactment und Rekonstruktion artikulieren jeweils unterschiedliche Verhältnisse zu jenem Original, das wieder/hergestellt werden soll. Sie treffen jeweils andere Aussagen über die Arten und Weisen der Vermittlung, die wiederum die Dramaturgie des Stückes bestimmen. Alle vier Begriffe formulieren ein bestimmtes Verhältnis zu unserer Gegenwart. Rekonstruktion im allgemeinen Sinn hat wenig mit der Vergangenheit zu tun, dafür aber die These, umso mehr mit unserer eigenen Gegenwart.

**2. Gedächtnisarbeit**

Claudia Jeschke hat in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit rekonstruktiven Praktiken die Unterscheidung der Gedächtnistheorie zwischen einem „kommunikativen“ und einem „kulturellen“ Gedächtnis aufgegriffen und diese im Hinblick auf den Tanz zu definieren versucht. Greift man auf diese Unterscheidung zurück, so entfallen auf jede der beiden Formen des Gedächtnisses je zwei der hier vorgestellten Konzepte. Im kommunikativen Gedächtnis besteht noch ein lebendiger Zusammenhang mit der Geschichte, der in erster Linie durch die mündliche und körperliche Weitergabe von Wissen durch Lehrer garantiert wird. In der rekonstruierenden Aufführung wird also noch eine Bedeutung für die aktuelle Arbeit und das Selbstverständnis einer Gruppe oder Kompanie zugesprochen. Hierunter lassen sich die Einstudierung und die Wiederaufnahme fassen. Das kulturelle Gedächtnis hingegen verweist auf weiter zurückliegende oder aktuell vernachlässigte Praktiken, mit denen kein lebendiger Austausch (mehr) unterhalten wird. Dies impliziert eine andere Form des Gedächtnisses, wie ein Archiv. Nicht mehr die lebendige Körperpraxis und die im Tanz so wichtige mündliche Überlieferungstradition können hier veranschlagt werden. Ist eine Aufführung einmal

### **1. Fallen for history?**

*Reconstruction is booming. And that has been the case for over ten years. Therefore it only seems logical that the second Biennale Dance Education should deal with this complex and contradictory topic. When, at the end of the 1990s, young choreographers and dancers such as Thomas Plischke, Martin Nachbar, Jérôme Bel or the French group Le Quatuor Albrecht Knust began to examine important positions of dance history on stage instead of lecturer auditoriums, the phenomenon was interpreted as an end time one. The new development with which dance has identified itself since modern times seemed to be exhausted. Before the turn of the millennium, dance is sure of its own history. Numerous commentators myopically complained about the movement having come to a halt and the modern times project being exhausted. Yet the tendency has even intensified in the new millennium. No sign of end time or apocalyptic sentiment. With the duplication of the attempts to approach the positions of dance history, the number of notions used to describe these phenomena has increased as well. Does this mean production equals reconstruction and can ballet companies therefore by definition be interpreted as an event from the past? What distinguishes it from a reopening or even from a re-enactment?*

*This text aims at making proposals as to how it would be possible to distinguish between the different notions and concepts. Production, reopening, re-enactment and reconstruction each articulate a different relation to the original to be reconstructed. They each make a different statement about the different ways of conveyance, which in turn determine the piece's dramaturgy. All four notions constitute a certain connection to the present. Reconstruction in general has little relation with the past, but, according to the thesis, has a great deal to do with our own present.*

### **2. Working with memory**

*In her examination of reconstructive methods, Claudia Jeschke picks up on the differentiation between a "communicative" and a "cultural" memory in memory research theories and attempted to define it in terms of dance. Should this differentiation be implemented here, it becomes obvious that each of the two memory forms can be associated with two of the concepts represented here. Where communicative memory is concerned, there still is a vivid connection to history, which is above all guaranteed by oral and physical knowledge transfer by teachers. The performance to be reconstructed is thus also attributed with significance for the current work and the self-conception of a group or company. This is true for production and reopening. The cultural memory on the other hand refers to practices that date further back or that are currently neglected, with which*



there is no (longer) a lively discourse. This implies another form of archive. Neither the vivid body practice nor oral tradition that is so important in dance can be used here. When a performance has passed into the cultural memory, the connection is severed. With it, the significance of historic practice for the present is no longer evident as well. Here, the archive of body knowledge is confronted with the archive of documents. Thus, re-enactment or redoing, which is the same thing here, and reconstruction have to be attributed to the cultural memory.

**2.a.** The production of a choreography is generally based on a notation as well as on the work of the dancers in the ballroom with people that are still familiar with the performance practice of the piece. The production of a choreography can mostly be seen as a complete work, which means that the consulted notations or sources such as video recordings or texts do not become part of the performance's dramaturgy. The objectives of a production can be varied. When restricting oneself to the topic of memory work, one can say that a production always is an interpretation of the piece as well, revealing what the pieces themselves could not yet know at their date of origin, but which can appear in different historic circumstances.

**2.b.** After a piece has been produced and performed, it can be reopened after a long absence from the playing schedule. Therefore, reopening refers above all to the repertory of a company, who thus nourishes its own memory. In the process, it can happen that roles are cast differently. This can be compared to production, as the same principles apply. With the help of other dancers, ballet masters, co-tutors and/or video recordings, the new dancers are introduced to the vivid tradition of the piece and are put in the position to embody it.

**2.c.** The notion of re-enactment focuses on the moment of performance. A scenic process is once again carried out in a physical way in front of an audience. This phrase implies that at one point, this process was not carried out, which means that there must have been a pause, a longer break in the performance practice. This is the reason why we are dealing with the cultural memory here. For a long time, the notion of re-enactment had been used almost exclusively for reproductions of productions that have always taken place in a restricted time frame. Passion plays may serve as an example here, as they were only performed on special occasions, at a certain location for a certain time, such as for Easter on the marketplace of a certain township. Thus re-enactment signifies the reproduction of the plays. Yet on the other hand, it also implies the revival of a form or a tradition, the continuance of which had once been radically interrupted, when the plays did not take place for several decades. The reproduction is also connected to a possible change in context and location. Maybe now the performance can take place at another time than Easter or at a location that is not sacred. Furthermore, it can take place for other reasons than religion. Focussing on the vivid moment of performance principally turns every performance of a repertory piece into a re-enactment. Meanwhile, drama scholars have agreed on the differentiation of the two notions of staging and performance. While the staging of a piece or choreography refers to invariant arrangement of the used means



and notes, the notion of performance describes the actual implementation in the here and now in front of the audience. And seeing that this here and now is different each night, the performance of the same staging also is a different one each night.

2.d. While re-enactment already postulates a discontinued line of tradition, the notion of reconstruction underlines the radical loss of an original that could be reproduced. It emphasizes the designed and thus invented character of each re-enactment, demanding a decision from the production team due to breaks in the oral tradition. By underlining the work required during staging, the notion of reconstruction refers above all to the production process. The loss of an original that could be produced and performed again forces the production team to resort to historic sources: notations, written or oral tradition, pictures, photographs, reviews, reports and today maybe even film or video recordings. Naturally, the gaps in the material are increasing the longer the performance dates back. Yet even in cases where the artists participating in the historic performance are still alive and there is oral or even physical tradition and continuity would thus be possible, other gaps are appearing: gaps in memory and the subjective view of things. Millicent Hodson could not have reconstructed Waslaw Nijinsky's choreography of "Le Sacre du printemps" (1913) relying solely on her conversations with Mary Rambert, although she had been Nijinsky's assistant. Contemporary witnesses thus have to be seen as a source among others that has to be evaluated and classified. According to the Slovenian theoretician and theatre artist Janez Jansa, reconstruction is always based on the decisions of contemporary artists. And where the composition of the piece is concerned, these artists are driven by their modern-day interests, their questions about the object and even by their aesthetics.

### 3. Reconstruction Varieties

Where reconstruction is concerned, Astrid Peterle differentiates between the copying and the reflecting approach. While the copying approach assumes that aura or effect of a performance can be reconstructed when the context and the difference inherent in each repetition are faded out, the reflecting approach underlines the difference between yesterday and today. In contemporary dance, there are examples for both approaches. With his work "A Mary Wigman Dance Evening", based on film recordings, photographs, written certifications and his work on Wigman's movement quality, Fabian Barba tries to create the highest possible congruence between original and copy. Using music, costumes and even the dancer's haircut, Barba strives for a mimetic adoption of Wigman's personal gestures and also of the situation, so that a closed form without breaks is achieved. Yet Barba does not so much focus on a continuity of effects by copying the original, but rather underlines the strangeness that Wigman's aesthetics can cause with a modern-day audience, a strangeness of gestures and movement, a strangeness of the situation on stage and the staging of the body. The leap in time does not happen on stage, but is realised between the stage and the audience.

Yet there are other examples: In his much discussed examination of Dore Hoyer's cycle

"Affectos Humanos" (1962), "Urheben Aufheben", Martin Nachbar openly reveals his sources and even includes a film recording of Dore Hoyer into the performance. While Barba does not put his personal motivation and questions for the German expressionist dancer into his staging and the dramaturgy of the evening, Nachbar begins with laying open his working processes, his own biography and the questions he was guided at by the now ten-year examination of Dore Hoyer. Thus decision processes are revealed that relate his modern-day position as a dancer and choreographer. All of these shifts between the means and the material create a division of the audience's view, a tension between yesterday and today, between Hoyer and Nachbar, always reflected by the distance as well. This turns the gap between the two into the actual scene of the evening. Yet one can find many more approaches between these two. For example in Anne Collod's reconstruction of Anna Halprin's "Parades & Changes" performance (1965), the reconstruction sources are not integrated into the dramaturgy of the evening and the work thus gains character. Although the performance begins with the dancers descending from the auditorium onto the stage and thus into the past and using personal memories of the 1960s to reflect their distance or rather their connection to this time, the invented new parts (for example where music is concerned) and the reconstructed sections are juxtaposed as the performance continues.

#### 4. Finding your Way in a Labyrinth

Summing up, it can be said that reconstruction poses questions relating to our present. Seeing it this way, it becomes obvious that the main emphasis is not put on knowledge of a historic body practice or aesthetics, but that when examining the past, one playfully explores the own not-knowing. What can I even know today? Today, where the world is ruled by computers, the sheer mass of information has become completely unclear for each of us. Using the internet, knowledge is always categorized into right or wrong, important or dispensable. Everything is always potentially accessible. Going even further, reconstruction constitutes a confrontation with our not-knowing, which is efficiently explored by artists. According to sociologist Dirk Baecker, knowledge today means dealing with fragments in order to find a personal access to culture. Even fragments can provide a certain foothold. People only have to decide which one to use. It is precisely this decision that is at stake in reconstruction. Reconstructions provide the opportunity to make decisions, which become the only resort for the contemporary man. Reconstruction constitutes the examination of something one can never have and understand (completely), something that remains strange and elusive even after persistent work. Thus reconstruction can be described as working with something different, strange, something that resists subjective recognition and usage. It puts us and our time at risk. Because failure is always taken into account, reconstruction poses above all questions relating to the relationship we have with ourselves, our body and our culture.

