



WHO OWNS THE (DANCE)PRESENT?

Essays by Johannes Odenthal,
Sasha Amaya and Raphael Moussa Hillebrand

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WHO OWNS THE (DANCE)PRESENT?

Who actually decides which types of dance are considered “contemporary” and which are not? Is Street Dance one of them? Philippine Dance? Flamenco? Yes, no, maybe? And what does crossover mean: great arbitrariness or diversity at the cutting edge?

In the 2023/24 season, we have invited three experts to talk about dance in the here and now. Over the course of the year, we published three essays by Johannes Odenthal, Sasha Amaya and Raphael Moussa Hillebrand, which in some cases refer to each other and can also be read as replicas.

This written discourse series led to a public panel discussion with the three authors as part of ALLES TANZT in May 2024. The discussion was moderated by choreographer, dancer, author and academic Nora Amin.

WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY DANCE?

An approach

Today, we can look back on 120 years of dance history. New forms of movement have constantly emerged and the human body has been explored as a unique storehouse of knowledge. Dance, a medium of learning and transformation, is a place of self-determination and identity.

We can speak of a century of dance. Terms such as free dance, new dance, modern dance, post-modern dance, expressionist dance and dance theater, Butoh or Nouvelle dance and many more as part of modernity.

Modernity is often equated with the contemporary. "Contemporary" is a vague term because what is considered to be "contemporary" is in a constant state of change. Contemporary is openly structured and can be redefined again and again for every social and cultural-political situation. Despite this formal openness, there are certain principles which differ the contemporary from modernism.

The postcolonial perspective on modernity is helpful here. This postcolonial perspective, which can clearly be read as a project of the West, belongs exclusively to European and North American identity and philosophy. The linearity of modernity and its hegemonic power structure accepted yet stigmatized the dances of Asia, Africa or Latin America as traditional forms, resulting in their exclusion from art. This power structure has become obsolete through the emancipation of artists worldwide.

The very late departure from colonial disenfranchisement that began with the liberation movements in the 1960s has since reorganized the art scenes

worldwide. Okwui Enwezor exemplified this awakening in the exhibition "The Short Century" in 2001 and then at documenta 11. Since this exhibition, art scenes around the world have changed in this enlightened and emancipatory sense.

The French writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant (1928–2011) rejected the linearity of Western modernity more than almost anyone else. Glissant developed the alternative concept of simultaneity, in which different forms of knowledge can interact with each other on an equal footing.

William Forsythe's encouraging students to study as many techniques and body languages as possible in order to realize the potential of decisions for the future mirrors exactly what Glissant demands for a sustainable culture. It is the call to achieve the greatest possible freedom of choice, to get involved in new things and thus to assume personal responsibility.

Forsythe is quoted in the volume *Tanztechniken 2010*, edited by Ingo Diehl and Friederike Lampert for *Tanzplan Deutschland* (page 18). All the dance teachers interviewed in that publication describe the techniques of contemporary dance as constantly changing. The guidelines for the analysis of the comprehensive research include questions of location, socio-political contexts, biographical background, relevant theoretical discourses, understanding of the body, gender, space, aesthetic intention, other artistic practices, quality, didactics and methodology. This selection of questions alone shows the complex integration of the contemporary dance scene into social and cultural-political contexts, leading inevitably to ever new constellations.

In this respect, contemporary dance is diverse, not limited to one technique or aesthetic.

The openness of contemporary dance techniques is significantly expanded by somatic and perceptually oriented techniques: release, Alexander technique, eutony, the Feldenkrais method and body-mind centering, to name but a few. The concept of embodied knowledge, the potential of body experience and transformation has grown exponentially over the last 100 years.

Embodied research has opened up new horizons of knowledge that have unique potential for contemporary dance. At the beginning of the 20th century, the body was charged as the medium for self-determination by reform pedagogy, the philosophy of life and new aesthetic possibilities in dance. Today, dancers move into new areas of knowledge production and critical practice based on physical research.

At the same time, the concept of dance as an event between the performer and the passively receptive audience has changed. The key word is participation. When viewed through the idea of participation, dance is a shared experience that gives rise to new ritual practices. New formats are constantly developing in public space, interventions are being transferred from demonstrations to the context of art. Formats of participation and inclusion break the exclusive concept of modernity.

The changes I have described here — a postcolonial redefinition of art and culture, the body as a field of research and the opening up of traditional event concepts — are criteria for what I understand contemporary dance to be. When asked about the burning challenges facing dance today, there is no single answer. Nevertheless, I would venture to name at least two topics that contemporary art and dance currently deal with. One topic is how the dance scene can assert its own space in parallel with advancing digitalization and AI. I see the contemporary dance scene as an important response to the lack of ritualized community building, the combination of individual exposure and social power. Every dance performance, every workshop and every dance practice is a response to digitalization. Dance as a body-based art form takes on a great responsibility here like no other discipline. Dance possesses infinite potential as resistance, as liberation and as a dialog partner. Just as photography as an art form has to reposition itself against the flood of images from mobile devices, so too will contemporary dance in real space.

As a body-based art form, dance takes on a great responsibility like no other discipline.

I see a similarly great opportunity in relation to the present environmental destruction and climate crisis. The return to the human body as the basis of our existence and as part of nature becomes the sounding board for a different perception and a different way of acting. This is where the traditional knowledge of pre-Christian cultures and contemporary dance scenes come together. Contemporary dance has its own rich tradition of knowledge, based on the migration movements of recent decades and expressed in the cultural variety and diversity of our present. The destruction of the environment is existentially linked to people. The overexploitation of the environment is reflected in the exploitation of the individual, of minorities or of collective endeavors such as in war or terror.

Even though I previously described contemporary dance as a response to the hegemonic structure of modernism, modern dance is also the historical foundation of the contemporary dance scene.

If we compare the basic impulses, principles, and intentions of expressive dance or modern dance with those of contemporary dance, the continuities become visible. The driving forces of development were and are emancipation from social confinement and restriction, the fight against injustice, the assertion of difference, whether in relation to one's own body, sexual orientation, ethnic, linguistic or class-specific. Contemporary dance always becomes a field of resistance, of difference, of emancipation.

Contemporary dance is a forum (and form) of self-empowerment.

This can be seen most clearly in the countless solo productions: the assertion of one's own space, one's own visibility. The individual dancers assert their difference and diversity, their identity beyond national definitions and restrictions. At the same time, contemporary dance is a forum for self-empowerment. The presence on a stage in front of people is the radical delivery beyond all disguises of identity. Young people are accepting this challenge more and more in order to find their way. Here it becomes clear that adherence to formal aesthetic categories is not conducive to the development of contemporary dance.

It is important that the term “contemporary” is not used as a concept of value that determines artistic quality. I would like to give an example of this: Contemporary African dance was very much defined by the platforms to which festival representatives, especially from Europe, regularly made pilgrimages to develop their programs. For many African artists, this was the only way to finance their artistic work in the short term. These platforms were decisively shaped by the European intermediary organizations. The question remains as to how neo-colonial structures are once again shaping the definition of belonging. This is why I advocate a concept of simultaneity in the sense of Edouard Glissant, for an “archipelagic” way of thinking and acting beyond exclusive positions, a concept of self-questioning and openness without hierarchies.

Berlin, October 2023

Literature

Edouard Glissant, *Traktat über die Welt*, Heidelberg 1999

Edouard Glissant, *Philosophie der Weltbeziehung. Poesie der Weite*, Heidelberg 2003

Tanztechniken 2010 – Tanzplan Deutschland. Herausgegeben von Ingo Diehl und Friederike Lampert, Leipzig 2011

Das Jahrhundert des Tanzes. Ein Reader. Herausgegeben von Johannes Odenthal, Berlin 2019

About the author



Johannes Odenthal is co-founder of the magazine *tanz aktuell* 1986, now TANZ. He was artistic director for music, dance and theater at Haus der Kulturen der Welt (1997–2006) and from 2006 to 2022 program director of Akademie der Künste, Berlin. His most recent publications on dance include “Das Jahrhundert des Tanzes” published by Alexander Verlag in 2019, “Ismael Ivo. Ich glaub an den Körper” and “Ins Offene. Nele Hertling – Neue Räume für die Kunst”, both published by Spector Books 2022.

Sasha Amaya

ON DANCING IN THE NOW

Contemporary dance is defiance
It is a move away from ballet
It is a dance which takes into account a diversity of forms,
but also, often, exploits them
Contemporary dance is a coming together of bodies
It is a quiz and a test
Contemporary dance is a thought exercise, an intellectual defence,
a test of patience
It is a connection to emotion
The reality of the embodiment of things that we only ever
read about, hear about, think about
Fantasize about
But enacted in front of us, with us, together
Contemporary dance is a disguise
It is a cultural product
It is a trap
It is a white floor
Displaying a brown body
Called art
On tour
It is a battle
Contemporary dance is a premise
Something unfinished
Something fuzzy
Contemporary dance is, after all, a poem
Relying on and eluding analysis
Exploding imaginations
Contemporary dance is a surprise
A new dramaturgical arc
Something confusing
Something of beauty
Sometimes very boring
Contemporary dance is timing
Timing
Timing

Above are listed a few of the thoughts I first sketched when I was asked what the term “contemporary dance” connotes. The term has the feel of the universal, encompassing everything in the now. Is not what is in the now the same as the contemporary? But the term, when partnered with ‘dance’, is deceptive. Unpacking its meaning, my mind skips through an oft-cited uni-directional arc of western dance history: ballet → modern → contemporary dance. This is only one possible meaning of contemporary dance, of course, but as the understanding of this term as linked to this lineage is so dominant, it funnels my initial responses. Indeed, contemporary dance, presented as such, does appear as a movement of research, defiance, renovation, and experimentation. But when we really think about the terms ‘contemporary’ and ‘dance’, this hegemonic structure is revealed as only one thin trail of the dance that is happening in our contemporary moment. So if that is only a thin slice of its possible scope, then what indeed is contemporary dance?

Johannes Odenthal, whose essay precedes mine in this series, writes that a post-colonial reading of this lineage is helpful, as it enables us to frame this pedigree not as a universal but rather, more honestly, as a ‘project of the west’ (Odenthal 2024). Further, he argues, in doing so, modernism’s stigmatization and othering of dance from the global south becomes obsolete through the capacity of contemporary dance to acknowledge simultaneities (Glissant in Odenthal 2024). As such, Odenthal suggests, contemporary dance is ‘not a technique, an aesthetic’ but rather a ‘diversity’ in itself (Odenthal 2024).

New content, old structures: the contemporary dance landscape today

But has contemporary dance really transcended to become a ‘diversity in itself’? I agree with Odenthal in the respect that the dance we tend to refer to as contemporary dance has broadened, or, at least, is more difficult to define (not quite the two same things, but oft conflated), but I wonder to what extent this diversity exists. There has, most definitely, been an expansion of the movement vocabulary and superficial aesthetics of what might be included in contemporary dance. “Other” dance traditions have found themselves welcomed on the art stages of Europe—generally the standard for whether something succeeds in its contemporaneity or not for at the time of writing the finances and infrastructures for art in

western and northern Europe are still larger than elsewhere – including other forms of movement, other rhythms, other languages, other costumes, other hair, other/ed faces. However, the scene still demands a particular framing of these new “diversities”. Aesthetically, we often see something ‘cultural’ on the cleanest of stages or in a white box gallery: a brown body on a white stage. And despite the more ‘diverse’ content on view, those who make the decisions – curators, juries, critics – are still much less diverse. The content changes, but those who determine the content do not.

Yet even more powerful than the aesthetic framing of works – and one of our most genuine challenges – is the dramaturgical. If a piece exhibits vivid colours, novel dance moves, new bodies, it can be framed as the diversity of contemporary dance. But if a piece truly charts a different arc in its energy, its narration, its relation to audience satisfaction, or does not engage with certain production values, it is a real challenge to western audiences. Often what is lacking are the tools to see, hear, sense, and make sense of real difference. How are we able to determine if something is of value or not, is worth further support or not, should be on tour or not, when we don’t really have the capacities to see, listen, feel, or speak about it?

Indeed, a shared sense of knowledge is important to audiences of contemporary dance, but how much must we be in the know to appreciate something? It can be too easy to get tangled up in a taste for references or stylistic histrionics. A European ‘contemporary dance’ public seems to need to know that we, choreographer and performers, are in on the joke, or are on the right political side, or have been duly updated, viz. are similarly educated and thus the same in a quite fundamental way and are not perpetuating some nonsense from ‘the past’. It is an inglorious colonial condescension, but also whiffs of genuine anxiety, a fear of the earnest, of standing out, of being identified as ‘other’ oneself. If uncertain, it’s safer to be cynical. Safer to cast doubt.

In my own work thus far, I have been interested in creating, and sharing, an earnest relationship to my material, which, tending to be sourced from unfashionable themes – baroque dance, beautiful white men, rhizomatic self-portraiture – has also engendered a particular engagement with risk. Staying with this material, rather than distancing myself from it to join the audience, is often both confusing and decidedly unattractive in the European context. Am I in on the joke? Or do I love the baroque!? It is hard for the audience to know sometimes, and that makes them uncomfortable. But, within my own practice, doing so enables two

things to open: a relationship to my material that enables a distinct choreography, and, secondly, the visibility of the dynamics between audience and artist.

In his essay ‘The Local Prejudice of Contemporary Dance’ Fabián Barba writes about the colonization of contemporaneity. The ‘contemporary’ should, in its most denotive sense, refer to the present. As such, as Barba also points out, the contemporary should really point to any dance that is happening now. And yet this is far from the case. We do not usually include breaking, cumbia, or line dancing as contemporary dance practices – though they are danced in our present moment (Barba 2016:52, examples my own).

Rather, Barba argues, contemporary dance has a connotative labelling function, that does not really mean the contemporary, but rather points to the now of a singular, European-led conception of the present (Barba 2016:50, also after Dipesh Chakrabarty). For example, Barba cites a work created in Colombia that European cultural workers deemed “looked 80s” (Barba 2016:49) despite its contemporaneity, viz. despite it equally happening in the now. This example points to the insulting and exclusive assumption that contemporaneity is the domain of Euro-centric tastemakers, an assumption belied by the term’s superficial openness. Yet as this remains our main understanding of the contemporary, curators and audiences witnessing works that play by (or with) the rules of a different game often question whether a work is a bit old fashioned or not very good. Instead, it would behoove us to wonder more about our own positionality and learn to understand that multiple contemporaneities can exist, sometimes placing the cosmology of a work outside our own current knowledge. While the conversation and what we see on stage has developed enormously in the nearly ten years since Barba wrote, the core of Barba’s inquiry – ‘Why is it difficult to recognize two simultaneous dance scenes as contemporary to each other?’ (Barba 2016:49) – remains relevant. Will it be harder to judge pieces? To know who is worth of funding? Will we be uncomfortable as outsiders who don’t always understand what we are seeing? Yes, but doing so will continue to broaden our scope of understanding of what dance in the now can be, where the big rules of performance – choreography, dramaturgy, notions of authenticity, relation to an audience – are being played out in a beautiful variety of different games.

Complexities of exclusion: hierarchies of otherness, application buzzwords and the hand-to-mouth dilemma

While recognition of multiple contemporaneities might be one of the hardest conceptual paradigms to shift, the problem of the depth and richness of contemporary dance creation also exists on a very material basis which must be mentioned. For to split the problem between the west and non-west, the global north and global south is too simple for our contemporary moment. As Moshtari Hilal and Sinthujan Varatharajah point out in their book *Englisch in Berlin*, acceptance, validation, and commodification is a complex process which often also supports global elites as recent arrivals while disenfranchising second or third generation Europeans with a migration background. Within the art scene, they suggest that global elites who attend international art schools are educated in a way more similar with that of curators, juries, and the spectating public, while retaining an ostensible ‘otherness’ that makes them particularly commodifiable within the contemporary art market (Hilal and Varatharajah 2022:95-96). The flip side of this, Hilal and Varatharajah argue, is that it is Europeans with a migrant history, often racialized and who have needed to fit into the German system, who are no longer seen as foreign enough yet who are neither in possession of the privileges of the racialized-as-white middle class in Germany (Hilal and Varatharajah 2022:85-97, 113). The fact is that many, though not all, immigrants growing up in the northern hemisphere do so out of necessity, facing years of racism and prejudice, and the grief that accompanies so many with complex identities. To survive we must try to fit in, but, once we do, we are no longer authentic or connected – often to those whom we leave behind in our home countries, as well as those in the contemporary scene who cherry-pick their diversity.

The narrowness of what falls under contemporary dance today is further revealed when we consider socio-economic class markers, which affect those of us who are both racialized-as-other and non-racialized in the German scene. The scene’s outrageously precarious funding model relies on, in the best-case scenario, working from one project to the next, with long wait times for answers, and short turn-around times for creation. Worst case scenario, nothing at all. Who can do that, year in and year out? Financially and psychologically? Those of us with support: with savings, with a family we can rely on, with a healthy housing situation. And in dance, where the practice of our

craft is not only possible at home with a computer, but necessitates being in a studio, generally with other persons, who also need to get paid, this model erodes foundational components of our craft's quality like daily training, studio time, and collaboration with others. And, of course, those few of us with the means to battle this are able to train more, research more, collaborate more. But the result for contemporary dance as an art form, is persons in similar situations making (often similar) things.

Further diminishment to variety and multiple contemporaneities in contemporary dance are also curtailed by the social. Curation is an important and enriching interlocutor in the artistic ecosystem, but the required support from a curator to even apply for funding in the German can be yet another gateway, particularly for artists who are not comfortable with or able to do the fundamental networking required, be that out of differences in culture, dis/ability, neurodiversity, or other marginalisations. Even those of us who have been formed, or have formed ourselves, into the right shapes for curatorial and public consumption, exist in a fickle world. Tastes change and change fast. We are encouraged to experiment, but it is hard to fail and get further funding, especially if you are a woman*, especially if you are brown or black. Geographic regions and thematics come in and out of fashion, and artists who have been able to move from the underpaid frenzy of the emerging years through the squeeze of the mid-career artist doomland are few and far between, if still our guiding lights.

Why does this matter? There is an argument for justice, for fairness, for more equality, sure, but it equally affects art, its quality, and its scope. Care is politically and artistically important. Because the possibilities that we set up for how we work as a system determine the condition of our bodies, the weight of power dynamics between makers and gatekeepers, our relationship to risk and failure, and the culture of inquiry within our community and with the public.

Risk, immateriality and the real

What do we mean when we say 'contemporary dance'? It is not the all-encompassing term that it might seem at first glance. There are barriers to what contemporary dance can be, both due to the circumstances of its production and who is included and excluded, but also to our very conceptualization of the 'contemporary' and the western tradition of colonizing the contemporary to depict a singularity, rather than multiplicity, of oneness.

Yet beyond these problematics, there are indeed things that 'contemporary dance' — describing the contemporary dance scene in its narrower senses, but equally, if not more, describing other works of dance happening in the now — share. I list here five attributes that suggest a broader, but still rigorous understanding of what we might include when we speak of the specialness of dance now.

These five attributes are: risk; resistance to material capitalism; the body memory recollected; the provision of shared, real-time, collective experiences; and community.

Contemporary dance is a risk. We are creating pieces that can fail in real time. We are bringing together that which is beyond, between, before, and after words. We are bringing things in and out of rhythm, but not relying on it to carry us through. We are merging ideas about the past and future. We are bringing together teams and trusting the parts will make a whole. Yet the tech can malfunction, our presence can falter, the audience can sit in expectation. Each night is an experiment, an offering of tingling layers, a spell brought forth which creates a vortex or whispers itself away. Contemporary dance, as such, is a risk: something vulnerable, tender, and ephemeral offered to an environment that is alternately generous, defensive, unready, collaborative, or sweet.

Contemporary dance is also resistance against material capitalist forces within and without the dance world. It is the manifestation and remanifestation, over and over again, that our time, our jobs, our lives can be spent meaningfully creating things that leave no material trace. It is difficult to commodify. It fades. Its impact is diffuse and, while evidently there, impossible to quantify. And to create it takes resources of time, space, materiality—real things that cost real money but don't promise a return on investment. As such, it is an activity and a profession which resists the common norms of professionalization, at times for the worse, but very often for the better, resists commodification, and resists material capitalism.

Contemporary dance is the provision of shared, real-time, collective experience. It is a bridge, or the blur, between apparent actor and observer, but however one parses it, it is a collective experience of the experimental. It is a public conversation. It is a sensing of things skin to skin with strangers. It is collective memory creation. And in a moment when our realities are so filtered through the algorithmic and the political, with an array of uncanny replicas parading before us, this coming together to experience something unknown, unpredictable, and unexpected is an astonishing instance of the

richness of communal experience.

Contemporary dance—though not only contemporary dance — is also a reminder of other knowledges, including those deep within us. While the contemporary art scene can often extract from and exploit othered knowledges, there is something fundamentally interconnected about the dancing body and knowledge that it brings, both within time — bringing together the parts we normally compartmentalize in the west as mind, spirit, and body, for the dancing body is all of these things all at once all the time — and through time. It is the body memory recollected. It is a body that reverberates with the traditions of our past, sometimes in recognition of this and sometimes not. Other times this knowing simply burns itself forth through our limbs, our skin, our breath, the astonishing totality and vivacity of all of those before us through those of us dancing now. It is a way of thinking about, valuing, and honouring the entire body: the human body, the animal body, the body politic, the earth body, the cosmic body.

And finally, (contemporary) dance is social community. It is seeing the same people at the same shows. It is following choreographers and booking your tickets on a specific night to listen to the after talk. It is the group of people you greet every morning at professional training, or the evening class where an eclectic friendship group develops. It is the feeling of elation taking a workshop with someone you admire, or starting to see the same people attend your work, the unfamiliar becomes familiar, the public not as concept but as encounter, conversation, and support. It is, as such, recognized faces, friendly hellos, coffee after training, drinks after the show, that buzz of a smile heading home after the dance.

Berlin, May 2024

About the author



Sasha Amaya is a dancer, choreographer, and installation artist. Amaya's works are occupied with form, movement, dance, art history, collage, text, and architectural surrounds as means to revisit the so-called canon of art history. In doing so, she utilizes, rejects, reframes, and repurposes historical narratives and techniques in contemporary artwork as part of a broader illumination and reconfiguration of the relationship between politics, aesthetics, and the possible. Shown in both visual art and choreographic contexts, her works are known for their combination of play and precision, her biting revisions of the art historical, and the body as a radical agent of form.

CONTEMPORARY DANCE 2.0

What does the term contemporary dance mean to us today? Contemporary dance is often seen as a direct descendant of postmodern dance. When this term emerged, it promised that all styles would find a place in it. But this promise has not yet been fully realized. Until today there are exclusions in contemporary dance that we are increasingly aware of. Therefore, in my opinion, it is time to say goodbye to the old understanding of contemporary dance and to redefine the term: It is time for contemporary dance 2.0.

History

If we look back at the development of dance, these exclusions become clearly visible. The postmodern dance revolution has its historical roots in New York in the 70s, particularly in the Judson Church movement. Although it saw itself as movement, in reality there were no significant points of intersection with the marginalized dance styles that emerged in the same city at the same time, such as breaking and voguing. It was hard to imagine back then that a b-girl or a voguer would participate in a jam at Judson Church or that a dancer from Judson Church would join a hip-hop cypher. Hip-hop and voguing arose out of the need to assert oneself in a racist and heteronormative system. Their dance became a survival strategy. Life in a racist patriarchy put them under so much pressure that this pressure became their artistic theme. While postmodern dancers often have the freedom and privilege to choose their subject and pursue artistic research.

My experience

When I was studying contemporary choreography, our professor asked what we wanted to caper about in our semester projects. I had to look up this word. The definition is to arbitrarily commit to something. I didn't know this capering. When we were breaking, our shows also had themes, but it was primarily about creating a character that was as strong and impressive as possible so that people would recognize my existence. So I thought the freedom to caper, belongs to contemporary dance artists. My own thought reflects the very exclusion I am talking about: breaking is also a contemporary art form, but is excluded from contemporaneity in language and spirit. Although exclusion from the present is an impossibility. We must recognize that alongside contemporary dance 1.0 there were and are movements that share the contemporaneity.

It has taken 20 to 30 years for contemporary dance 1.0, vouting, breakin' and many other dance styles came into an actual exchange with each other, and today appear more and more often on the same stages and in the same discourses.

Social development

Since 2020 at the latest through the George Floyd movement and before that through #MeToo, society has become so aware of existing exclusions and injustices that contemporary dance 1.0, as it has been practiced so far, can no longer

exist. Dance by white people for white people, in which marginalized bodies can be part of the narrative, but in which the existing and practiced power imbalance is not questioned, is no longer in keeping with the times. It is no longer enough, only perceive discrimination where there is malicious intent, but not in the system itself. It's time to bring the power-critical approach, that we now have in our society, in contemporary dance as well and to dissolve systematic discrimination. We need to create equality. And equality does not just mean an understanding of equality, but the establishment of genuine participation (equity). This means that other dances need an extra platform in order to be on an equal footing

Contemporary dance is creolization

Equality and simultaneity. This is also what my colleague Johannes Odenthal speaks of in his text on the subject of "What is contemporary dance". I would like to thank him for the complexity of his reflections and for pointing out a contradiction: On the one hand, Odenthal names dance modernism as the root of contemporary dance. On the other hand he recognizes the exclusionary hegemonic power structure in this thinking, which understands modernity as linearity, and pleads for an "archipelagic" way of thinking according to Edouard Glissant, in which different dance forms can work together simultaneously and on an equal footing.

Odenal writes at the beginning: "[...] dance modernism is also the historical foundation of the foundation of the contemporary dance scene." But at the end he appeals: "[...] That is why I plead for a concept of simultaneity in the sense of Edouard Glissant, for an "archipelagic" way of thinking and acting beyond exclusive positions [...]" I think that a simultaneity of different dance forms beyond exclusive positions and hierarchies can only exist if we stop defining dance modernism as the essential foundation of contemporary dance.

I doubt that contemporary Peking opera rests on the foundation of Western modernism or that a headspin has developed from expressive dance (wink). There are many different dance traditions in this world that influence each other and can no longer be clearly separated today. Glissant's "archipelagic" thinking is a step towards this understanding. It assumes that people's identities are actually relational identities that develop like rhizomes. Like roots, they dig themselves into the earth and at the same time branches on all sides towards other roots. Rhizomes do not have a fixed

foundation, they are in a constant state of change, just as identities are not fixed but are constantly redefined in exchange with others. A process, called creolization.

Contemporary dance is creolization, the simultaneity of different contemporary forms of movement that exist free of hierarchy alongside, with and through each other and are one in their essence: Dance. The foundation for this dance is the entire global dance history.

That is why we need a definition of dance in which it is clear that every form of musical movement is dance. We need a definition that reflects its own position within a system of oppression and takes responsibility, to be critical of power and to oppose the unjust systems from which it emerges. A definition that dismantles the Western idea of superiority and recognizes that ethical and moral superiority lies on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Contemporary dance 2.0 must be about this. A balance between Western and non-Western worldviews, between cultural appropriation and cultural inclusion, between giving and taking.

In her text "on dancing in the now", Sasha Amaya, whom I greatly appreciate as an artist and thinker, poses the question: "What do we mean when we say contemporary dance?" Among experts, this seems to be a complicated question. For the general public, the term is probably much easier to understand. She told me how her dentist asked her what she does for a living. She replied that she does contemporary dance. The dentist replied which contemporary style she meant. He showed his openness to relate contemporary dance to the here and now and not to a particular tradition. Perhaps we need to bring this openness back into the professional discourse.

Definition of contemporary dance 2.0

I propose to define contemporary dance 2.0 as follows: All dance forms that present and do not primarily serve to fulfill archival functions are considered contemporary. This includes dance styles that do not originate from the Western tradition, such as Latin American dances, Afro-diasporic or urban dances and club dances, as well as those that we often deny a political dimension.

The term contemporary dance 2.0 is not primarily intended to mark a specific aesthetic, but rather a temporal localization and a social positioning. It should promote an inclusive perspective and make

it impossible to deny people or art forms their contemporaneity. Subgenres will continue to exist to designate styles. Contemporary dance 2.0 does not necessarily have to emerge from a Western academic tradition to be considered contemporary.

The entire global dance history forms the breeding ground, which is permeated by a rhizome. This rhizome forms the basis for plants. These plants are our bodies. And our bodies blossom in dance.

About the Autor



Berlin, May 2024

Choreographer, dancer, curator, speaker and activist **Raphael Moussa Hillebrand** was born in Hong Kong in 1982. Rooted in Germany and West Africa, raised in Berlin and trained in hip hop, he completed his master's degree in choreography at the Berlin University of the Arts — HZT Berlin in June 2014. His artistic work is a fusion of body and language, a creative journey through decolonial narratives that invites the audience to reflect on entrenched thought patterns. As an idea generator and founding member of the world's first hip-hop party: Die Urbane, he is committed to decolonization, empowerment and cultural diversity, among other things. With his charm and openness, Hillebrand is an artist through and through who recognizes that the body is a motor to courageously overcome the social imbalance in our society. In 2020, he was honored by the German Dance Award for his outstanding artistic developments in dance.

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