



The Observation of Question

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Introduction

In this essay I want to focus on analyzing Pina Bausch's choreographic methods, using NELKEN as a case study to review her compositional choice, aesthetic perspectives, background and inspiration of her creation. Then I will further develop into reflecting my own creation disCOVER, documenting selected resources and process.

1. Who is Pina Bausch ?

Pina Bausch (July 27, 1940 - June 30, 2009) was from the first postwar generation and graduated from the Folkwang-Hochschule in 1958. After graduation she received a grant for further studies at the Juilliard School, New York. (Climenhaga, Sourcebook 16) She studied with Antony Tudor, Paul Taylor and José Limón on precisely the time when a strong reaction against these formal techniques of modern dance arose. Bausch's first work as a choreographer and creator of new pieces began in 1968 after her mentor Kurt Joss retired. In 1972 Bausch was asked to choreograph the dances for a production at Wuppertal Opera Ballet, and the success of her unconventional staging led to her being offered the position of director. Bausch renamed the company to Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1973. (Climenhaga, Practitioners 10)



2. What is NELKEN ?

Excerpts from Dance review "Talking about NELKEN" which I have written:

The arena of the theater was calm and I approached it with a crowd of audience. At the beginning, the dancers carefully crossed the carnations and found their own positions, which seemed to mirror the path of the audience. One scene strongly impressed me: three men walked in a circle, and talked to the audience about their feelings of life as a third person. Then a speechless male dancer appeared, holding a microphone. The rigid body language mapped his timid character, seemingly not good at expressing or suppressing fear. This made me felt surprised, like a child who was doing something wrong. I wanted to manipulate the distance between the actor and me.



After a witty and cheerful group dance, my attention was gradually transformed into four men encountering one women. At first the women casually ate her cookies in front of the stage. She was gradually bothered by the action of those men: they took turns to throw themselves from the corner of the table repeatedly, while slowly getting closer to the woman with aggressive eyes. She sat back in a chair and I could not see her face, but her physical language let me read the fear of violence from her trembling left shoulder.

Cutting onions and letting the knife fall on the plate. Repeating until they were ground. The smelting of daily life and dance was like a deliberate process, waiting for the audience. The development made me dive into the lyrics, "And though it seems absurd, I know we both won't say a word."

Later everyone stood up and started to dance with the gesture of the four seasons. The densely crowded people watched the stage, but the carnations fell in the windless theater. However, the scene was completely different during the dress rehearsal I attended the night before. Those carnations stood straight on the stage. There was no extensive difference and no frightening moment. At the end actors walked back into the lit area and spoke in Chinese why they became a dancer. Some questions were then planted in my heart.....

3. What is the Context ?

Pina Bausch danced with thoughts, she asked questions to the world. She is a philosophic dance artist. I think philosophy is a way to find meanings, for example, the meanings of humanity, different interpretation of life or love. The expression of art is an interpretation and philosophy helps me to think about why I ask questions. There are many ways to do this. I can think from the perspective of psychology or science: Why we dance? But Bausch's work evolved from a personal, spontaneous response to a need for addressing challenging issues. Her work also broke the boundaries between established art forms.

Pina Bausch was inspired by some true stories and cities. She created *Nelken* in 1982. Later, Bausch was committed by many cities to create work based on her impression of that city. She was inspired by new countries, people and cultures: "It is an incredible piece of luck to be somewhere and not simply be a tourist, but to work there, to come into contact with other people."

4. What is her Choreographic methods ?

She had a famous quotation: "I am not so interested in how they move but what moves them"(Schmidt 1984:15-16) in reference to her ensemble. That statement could be used as a credo for a new theatrical approach. Bausch was often asked how she built her pieces, and she would divulged the method as asking question.(Climenhaga, practitioner 41) Through my research I have found there are some directions bringing me deeper into her choreographic methods.

Raising questions :

Bausch used materials that the dancers delivered during rehearsals, dancer making movements or spoke text. She would edited manuscript and collections of notes fragments in flux. In *Nelken*, the male dancers went about answering her questions differently to their female counterparts, every dancer contributes a response, include critical thinking and various perspective. Bausch asked questions; questions of elemental purpose, allowing her performers time to answer with words, with movement, with a performed moment. (Climenhaga, practitioner 52)

Bausch uses tools of theatrical presentation to readdress the base assumption from which interpretation arises, asking not only what moves us (physically and mentally), but more specifically how we are related to the question at hand, both as performers and as people in the world. That is one of the reason I felt deeply connected with the speechless men when I was watching *Nelken*. Bausch's questioning methodology and concentration on individual experience made valuable impact on my ways of seeing, opening up new pathways of connection with the worlds.

Character/ Dancer:

The rehearsal was an exploration of human behavior and experience via the questions she asked her dancers. "I look for the person...the personality"(Bausch 1985:14) It is related to asking questions, because the important dimension is whom she is asking. Her approach encouraged dancers to making criticisms and provide opinions.

In addition to performer, I must mention Raymund Hoghe, her dramaturgical collaborator between 1979 and 1990, who published some rehearsal notes and questions that she highlighted. Bausch and he tried to look beyond the mundane, habits, memories and rituals, develop a specific working process. Because each dancer have to work on their role in dance theatre, which is shown in a variety of different ways.

Compositional choice:

Repetition, the arrangement of a line is a common trajectory in her creation. Then the senses of cutting onions and seas of flowers are her symbols. When I analysis Bausch's work, gesture can be interpreted as a physical base, to reflect her approach and practice.

Bausch's theater was a combination of Brecht and Artaud because both Brecht and Artaud emphasize the use of "performer's body" (Miranda 324). Their emphasis are on the images. A play needs not be developed through coherent and logical events. It can be structured by actions that contain similar themes. In Bausch's productions I can see examples of how the compositional choice is employed in relationships and dynamic of movement.



Theme:

Dancers explore the body, love, gender and power on the stage filled with thousands of carnations. In the second segment of my dance review, the theme can be connected with the idea of gender conflict, women are portrayed as submissive and passive, men have the control of territory and status. Bausch asked, what are we actually doing in this world, at this time? Would more laughter be appropriate? Or more sorrow? She tried to find the universal in the particular, to filter it out, to distill and condense it, so that many people might recognize it.

Structure and music:

Bausch's work is non-linear, same as her music. The rhythmic support is a comment on the action. Traditionally, music is used in dance as a structural base. In Bausch's dance work such relationships are abandoned and the sense of fluidity in time development is replaced by constant rupture and fragmentation.

Miranda has researched Bausch's work from an interesting perspective, she called the way as An Explicit Dance Structure with Theatrical Tropes. She analyzed Bausch's choreographic structures as related to how she manipulated her choreographic devices (repetition, variation) and the transitions between movement sentences. Bausch inserted daily movements and theatrical tropes as her way of transition. (Miranda 202) This perspective is related to my purpose of writing review, It is an observation, which illuminated my interpretation and applied the principle of montage.



Set design:

The stage design suggested a contemporary Garden of Eden in which “ The Carnations.... have been trampled underfoot... and raised the questions about the possibility of love in an alienated, legalistic and dehumanized world” (Brockett 461)

5. What is disCOVER

In this part I will apply the above research materials to reflect upon disCOVER which I choreographed, documenting selected resources and process. My questions are posed to lead toward an uncovering of experience, that process as revealed after the performance.

disCOVER is a solo. I started with a fundamental ideas, whether derived from an open-ended question posed before rehearsal, or a exercise from which the developmental process emerged. This base structure is designed for reviewing rehearsal development and specific strategies.

No	Fundamental ideas	Raising questions	Exercise and source	Critical feedback
1	—The ways of seeing a body	Why is a solo dance?	1.1 Perfect body 1.2 Collapsing and stretching	Emerged loneliness and fear
2	—Nude	How is the relationship between internal and external being presented to the body?	2.1 Existence 2.2 Image of fold	Applied different range of intensity and metaphor
3	—Layers	What does the disCOVER mean to me?	3.1 Formal variation 3.2 Hide the emotion of fear	Reduced Logic

The ways of seeing a body:

1. My initial idea is the ways of seeing a body. Thus my first question comes out from what is a solo dance? I often ask myself what I can do. For me solo dance is to create self-watching and try to dance with myself and the whole space. I use different aesthetic to find identity boundaries.

Exercise and source include, I asked dancer few questions about how to defines a perfect body, and gave my dancer freedom to respond in different ways: through words, a performed image, or a movement phrase. The question I posed were aimed at the central feelings or ideas.

2. My dancer thought the synchronization between the body and brain is an essential element in a perfect body. The process of thinking took us into physical experimentation. I have designed a exercise “Collapsing and Stretching”, which produces a curved body. Using specific quality of movement to cover the outside space and not to exhaust the space, but to enrich it, fold it and manipulate it. I think movement is like a crease in the world. This exercise has challenged dancer’s coordination and generated materials.

The performer’s investigation in character has expressed a potential sensation of loneliness in dance, same as in life. Features such as fear of mistakes, fragile eyes, gestures... For me solo dance is a solitary production. It has a special meaning of being present. It can be traced back to birth, from birth to death.

Nude:

1. The second question might become more pointed and push toward individual experience. I think that when people come to the world, they are linked to an external world. Dance is my way of communicating with the external space and time. Dance cannot be separated

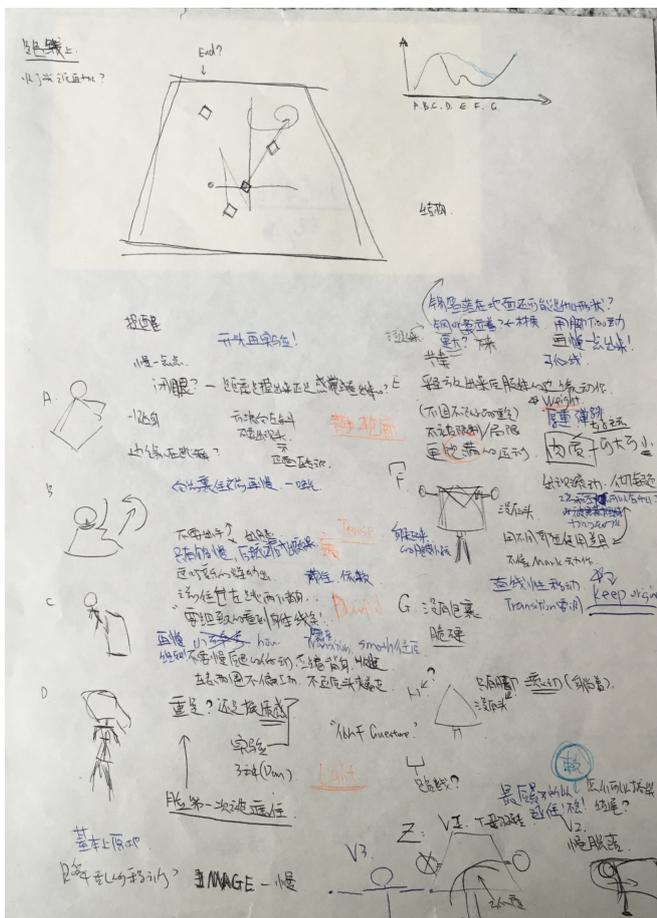
from the internal body, because it involves the connection of exposition and existence. A philosophical subject was derived from Heidegger who indicated that existence is external impositions and decide for oneself alone. This kind of self-identification filled my exploration of solo dance.

How is the relationship between internal and external being presented to the body? The question has led me to explore a kind of nakedness, and it does not represent integrity. Because the imagery of nudity shows an infinite fragility, such as when someone are naked and exposed to the crowd, they are completely external, or the inner is constantly pushed to the outside, so that the inner can be identified and recognized.

The task was designed to build a interaction between body and time, then starting to uncover the experience as it is felt by the internal force. I have used the concept of “core distort”, and apply different range of intensity to suspend against the pull of gravity. The phrase created by the task contained dynamic changes and generated specific intention.

2. In order to emphasize the internal and external relationships, I have developed from the previous exercise and the idea of nude. I used a flesh-colored jumpsuit , which embodied the effect of anatomized body. A silver moisture-proof pad, the texture is soft and can be shaped to creating polygonal etc. Those design aimed to create versatile layers as costumes, contrast with existing parts. Such as skin on the feet, hand and face. I assumed the body served both as a point of departure and a destination.

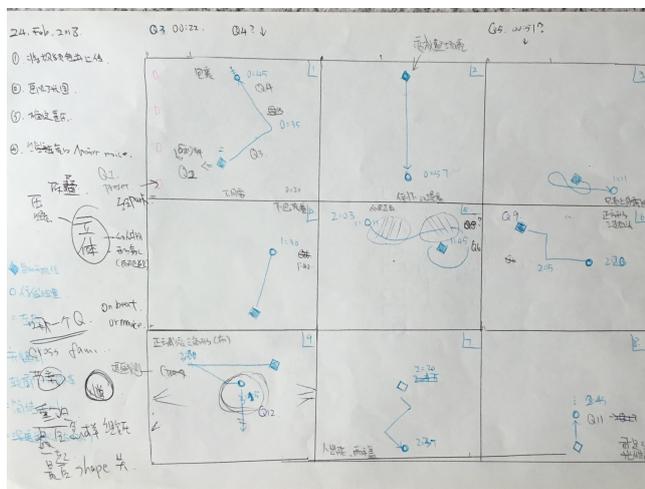
Therefore, I set a score for my dancer to react with those costumes and space, not just exploring the functionality of costume, such us parcels, recovering etc. Since alienation between dancer and costumes effect spatial orientation, I found two theme: Mechanization and Marine Organisms. I am intrigued by the metaphor of body alignment and various dimension of weight, which can be folded.



Layers:

1. I don't think the concept of solo dance refers to a person who talks about herself/himself on a stage. Through the body of many lonely people or fragments, a dancer may reflect the loneliness and exchange among others. The proposal explains why dance material itself is never meaningless, irrespective of who see/dance it, but that it inevitably carries semiotic content of human nature in solo form. My work is also a dialogue between choreographer, dancers and viewers.

The 3.1 exercise is Formal Variation, I started to exploring the dimensions of movement from a floor pattern. Once a phrase has been established, I can isolate a given element of the action and the phrase can become my generative model for a series of related development. The discrete body moves can conjure metaphoric layers, I began to exploring a new logic of originality, may not be the body's logic. But some movement was grounded in the conceit of the body by an internal kinesthetic -corporeal score. We are alive. But what are we living around? Because the curvature of the space creates gravity



and the bending and the desire are interrelated and we repeat the different roles in the open and the concave space, it's fluid. This exercise is linked to the notion of intention, impression and interpretation.

I think unison means a sense of pulling and has lots of space and time connection in it. When I collaborated with lighting designer, I emphasized the distance and serve the phenomenal of loneliness. While lighting designer have a focus on reflection, we are both individuals and true to the development of the work, but also really



connected with the body. After investigated from 3.1 exercise, dancer have the ability to recomposing same material with the electronic music, and lighting could manipulate the space. The work may created a sophisticate impression of discovering.

2.This definition goes beyond the commonly understood meaning as something done. Intention and layers are present in all participants. All participants have inspired me to think about how I would lead the process, rather than just thinking about the result or effect. But how can I draw enough instruction and well developed transition to guide my work to become 'our world'? One of my way is to hide the fear, even if it is not possible to



be completely rational. Then, I would enjoy more the pleasure of unknowing and explore with fear, not forgot it.

The most impressed compositional choices is the “layers”, which change my way of thinking about choreography and a body. This finding is interwoven with the research I have done before. I keep deducing my logic and the gap of questions. The process of questioning as a structural base for the pieces comes out of my growing confidence. The reflection offered me a deal more than an illustration of theory, readdressed my question.

Conclusion

If someone says Bausch’s method is just asking question or she just cares what move you physically, I would argue she choreographed with sophisticated process that revealed the unknown.

As a researcher, I was inspired to bring my ideas, histories, and connections to the Nelken and disCOVER. Bausch’s methodology has given me access to the questioning process will empower me as a young artist to continue pursuing and growing.

As Bausch said: The questions never end, and the searching never ends. There is something eternal, and that's the beauty of it. That I have only just begun.

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