

theatrical for the actor to transform from type to type, character to character, silhouette to silhouette – while the audience watched – in a poor manner, using only his own body and craft. The composition of a lined facial expression by using the actor's own muscles and inner impulses achieves the effect of a strikingly theatrical transubstantiation, while the mask prepared by a make-up artist is only a trick.

Similarly, a costume with no autonomous value, existing only in connection with a particular character and his activities, can be transformed before the audience, contrasted with the actor's functions, etc. Elimination of plastic elements which have a life of their own (i.e. represent something independent of the actor's activities) led to the creation by the actor of the most elementary and obvious objects. By his controlled use of gesture the actor transforms the floor into a sea, a table into a confessional, a piece of iron into an animate partner, etc. Elimination of music (live or recorded) not produced by the actors enables the performance itself to become music through the orchestration of voices and slashing objects. We know that the text *per se* is not theatre, that it becomes theatre only through the actors' use of it – that is to say, thanks to intonations, to the association of sounds, to the musicality of the language.

The acceptance of poverty in theatre, stripped of all that is not essential to it, revealed to us not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art-form.

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WOMAN, MAN, DOG, TREE

Two decades of intimate and monumental bodies in Pina Bausch's Tanztheater

Gabrielle Cody

Gabrielle Cody's analysis of Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Tanztheater (dance theatre) links her work to some of the most radical performance practice of the twentieth century. The bodies of Bausch's dancers are inscribed with their own personal histories, and, pushed to their physical limits in performance, they often appear to be suffering real pain. Cody examines the way that Bausch implicates the audience in this suffering by exposing the power relations implicit in the act of watching.

You're right in demanding that the artist have a conscious relation to his work, but you are confusing two ideas: solving a problem and posing a problem correctly.

– Anton Chekhov, *Letters to A. S. Suvorin*

Choreography too will reassume tasks of a realistic nature. It is a mistake of recent time that it has nothing to do with the depiction of "people as they really are." . . . In any case a theater that bases everything on Gestus cannot do without choreography.

– Bertolt Brecht, *Little Organon*

All life Murphy, is figure and ground.

– Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*

There is an eerie and seductive moment, right at the beginning of Pina Bausch's 1994 revival of *Two Cigarettes in the Dark*, when Mechthild Grossmann enters the stage in an evening gown, crosses down to the audience, and with the masterful delivery and conspiratorial tone of a career hostess declares: "Why don't you come in, my husband is at war." It's difficult not to want to follow this urban Clytemnestra into the gruesome psychic antechambers of Bauschland, to eat her promise. And we do, perhaps because we know we are

Bausch is leery of sociopolitical explanations for her kinetic phantasms. Her responses to what have become well-known generalities about her work are always meticulously cautious: "I can only make something very open, I'm not pointing out a view. There are conflicts between people, but they can be looked at from each side, from different angles" (in Hoffman 1994: 12), or, "You can see it like this or like that. It just depends on the way you watch. . . . You can always watch the other way" (in Hoghe 1980: 73). Ideological motives for her hypernaturalism are equally egregious in light of Bausch's ostensibly simple purpose: "I think that this is beautiful: real things onstage — earth, leaves, water" (in Hoghe 1980: 68).

Pathways to a new theatre aesthetic

Bausch's footfalls are at once banal and philosophical, reverent and irreverent routines on the ground of Being. Her most quoted observations are "I am not so much interested in how people move as in what moves them" (in Manning and Benson 1986: 43) and "The work . . . is about relationships, childhood, fear of death, and how much we all want to be loved" (in Price 1990: 325). One might be tempted at first to assume that Bausch is praising pure feeling over the emotional detachment of formalism; certainly Bausch, among other Germans of her generation, has re-explored the subjectivist tradition of *Ausdruckstanz*, the dance of expression epitomized in the 1920s by the movement choirs of Expressionistic choreographers such as Rudolf Laban, Oskar Schlemmer, Mary Wigman, and Kurt Jooss — Bausch's mentor during the 1960s. As Raimund Hoghe puts it, "In the theater of Pina Bausch one can experience many ways of looking, of becoming aware of one's subjective way of watching humans, relations, situations . . . ; there are many ways of seeing something within oneself as well as within others" (1980: 73). But I also suspect that Bausch wants to be taken quite literally when she speaks of a *mise-en-scène* based in what "moves" people: that is, what emotions or psychic wounds physically shape the body's public and private trajectories, from what parts of the body is history recalled?

Bausch says only that the stories of her plays are about human relations: ". . . I have tried to see them and talk about them. . . . I don't know anything more important" (in Hoghe 1980: 65). Her subjects are people on the street, in everyday life: "The way somebody walks or the way people carry their necks tells you something about the way they live or about the things that have happened to them" (in Hoghe 1980: 65). Similarly, idiosyncrasies are what she searches for in her actors: "I pick my dancers as people. I don't pick them for nice bodies, for having the same height. . . . I look for the person . . . , the personality" (in Loney 1985: 14). In brief, Bausch seems to be primarily interested in the choir of her dance company as an expression of the histories of individual bodies in relation to the larger cultural history of the body. As Kay Kirchman notes, Bausch's "genealogy" dramatizes the *multilingual body as text*, the body's discursive potential, the ways in which it is regimented, controlled, suppressed, betrayed, abandoned, and reformed through history: "The history of the body is . . . the history of what has been written in this form: as injuries, as hopes, as disappointments, as any experience at all" (1994: 42). Johannes Birringer suggests that Bausch's dialectical theatricality is rooted in social practice: "The borderline in Bausch's

tanztheater is the concrete human body, a body that has specific qualities and a personal history — but also a body that is written about, and written into social representations of gender, race, and class" (1986: 86).

[. . .]

From early in her career, Bausch has exposed the power relations inherent in erotic negotiations, classical dance training, and theatrical representation. By the mid-1970s, she specifically inscribes the conflict between the sexes (Manning and Benson 1986), and by the '80s her work examines gender as a compulsory performance. Bausch's distancing techniques are used in large part to explore the power relations of gendered bodies in representation. Price argues that "[h]er repeated movements signify that behavior between men and women is learned, culturally coded and determined, and just as inadequate as it is inept" (1990: 329). Bausch self-consciously uses mimesis as a grotesque form of mimicry and "undermines the referent's authority" (Diamond 1989: 62). In *Kontakthof*, the "signs" of gender are estranged through countermimicry, when a woman in red inspects one of the men's pelvic rotations and does not find it seductive enough: "Come on, I know you can do it, keep working on it," she says curtly. Not only does Bausch demonstrate that conventional ballet training is a catastrophic institution that perpetuates the coercive imitation of social mimesis — the reproduction of the reproduction of learned and culturally sanctioned gestures — but she also recognizes, as Judith Butler does, that those who fail to "do" the signs of gender right are punished (Butler 1990). Bausch's pieces invariably dramatize the notion that:

Gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. . . . This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization.

(Butler 1990: 277)

Bausch's plays are fraught with figures whose site of struggle is the relationship between their body and culturally sanctioned cloaks of legitimization. Women often tug at girdles and suffer high heels; men are shown to be restless, uncomfortable in the deadly uniformity of suits and ties. And when men cross-dress, they appear equally endangered. In *Two Cigarettes*, a man enters in an evening gown but almost immediately takes it off. He stands in the middle of the stage in his underwear and high heels unable to move. He finally removes the women's shoes, dons flippers, and enters the aquarium, where he immerses himself in water. Repeatedly, Bausch entrusts her dancers with what would appear to be the ludicrous and annihilating exercise of performing gender "well," that is, of expressing gender as a correlate of biological sex. In *Kontakthof* Bausch mercilessly spoofs this "corporeal project" by requiring her company to face a movie screen on the back wall and view a documentary film on the mating rituals of ducks.

Bausch also calls conventional proxemics into question. Marianne Goldberg describes a moment in Bausch's 1984 piece *Auf dem Gebirge hat man ein Geschrei gehört* (On the Mountain a Cry Is Heard) this way:

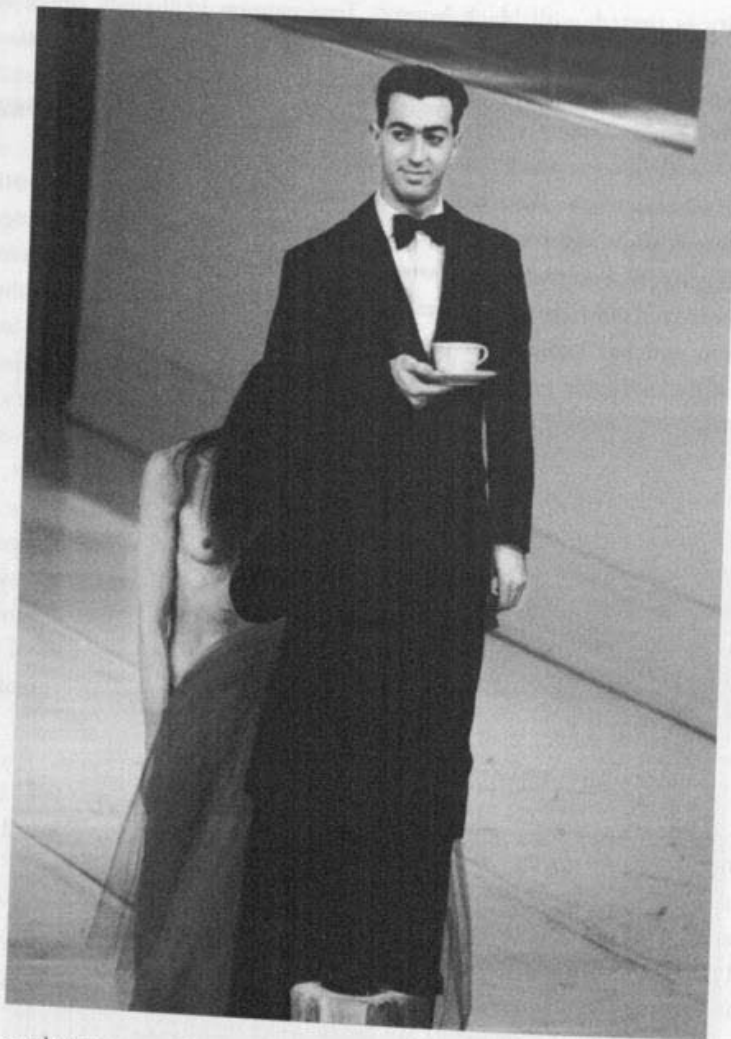


Figure 38.4 Exemplary moments from *Two Cigarettes in the Dark* (March 1985) and *Nur Du* (May 1996) [Figure 38.5] in which Bausch reproduces sadistic or manipulative displays of women and women's bodies, a practice criticised by some feminist practitioners and scholars.

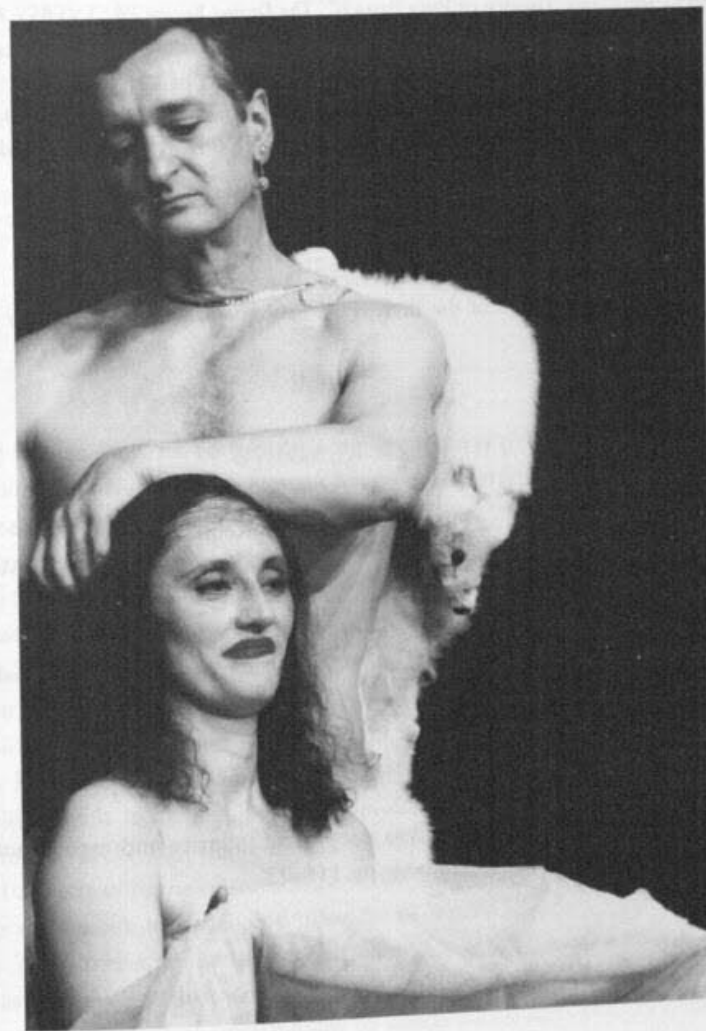


Figure 38.5

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