

Café Müller's Nocturne. **A Reading**

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English translation, Neil CHARLTON

Abstract

This paper analyses the phraseologies, poetical aims and themes of Pina Bausch's *Café Müller* (1978), trying to underline, on the one hand, the multiple links between its poetics and the forms of anachronism in the German culture of the sixties-seventies, mainly in relation to the memory of the Second World War and of the predominating currents of *Ausdruckstanz*, to justify, on the other, on a structural basis (through the analysis of some groundbreaking proceedings like repetition, desynchronisation, allegory) the fame of the piece as a masterwork of contemporary *Tanztheater* and as a paradigm of the so-called "silent dramaturgy".

Keywords: Bausch, *Tanztheater*, theatre-dance

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Jordi Fàbrega *in memoriam*

*Because there is no space at all for them,
their air was consumed long ago.
Like thieves, they are entitled to slip into dreams,
and let themselves be surprised in them.*

Elias Canetti

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It is difficult not to recall the mosaic of hasty opinions that in the 1980s promoted *Café Müller* as a spontaneous manifesto of a genre.² No matter how much the impressionism of the early times was remedied by less puerile hermeneutics throughout the generations, the meaning of the thing called Tanztheater is still surrounded by uncertainties of humanist taste and tendencies to lyrical drifts. Bausch's death has merely intensified this comfortable co-firing of exegesis and affection.³

Reading *Café Müller* with disenchantment almost forty years after its premiere will also mean struggling with the thankless effort of capturing a more detailed theoretical image of Tanztheater; undoing the maximalisms that have enabled the "theatre-dance" label to lose by dilution any chance of positively identifying certain artistic phenomena; and explaining how it was possible for 1990s conceptualism, greeted with metadiscursive orgies and hypertrophic alliances with the academic thought of Deconstruction

1. This article was conceived in the framework of the research group "Choreutic Heterotopias" at Rovira i Virgili University, coordinated by Dr. Licia Buttà and of which the author is a member.

2. In Italy, above all, the dithyramb came from the mass and timely approach by critics and audiences to an already extensive corpus of pieces by Pina Bausch — the most similar, until then, to a Tanztheater Wuppertal retrospective (Bentivoglio, 1985, p. 15; Climenhaga, 2013, p. 20-40).

3. In the years immediately before and after Bausch's death, the documentary films *Damen und Herren ab 65* (Lilo Mangelsdorff, 2002), *Tanzträume* (Rainer Hoffmann, Anne Linsel, 2010) and *Pina* (Wim Wenders, 2011) contributed at different levels to this propaganda agenda. However, the piece that opened this history of audiovisual sentimentalism in terms of the Tanztheater Wuppertal's work continues to be the memorable *Un jour Pina a demandé* (Chantal Akerman, 1983).

(Fratini, 2015), to end up validating a dogmatic choice between the supposedly cool intelligence of the new currents and the apparently warm emotiveness of the previous current; between the metadiscursive arsenal of an artistic thought that believed it was the great-grandchild of structuralism and the supposed impotence of an artistic “instinct” that was believed to be the grandchild of Romanticism, overly determined to cry at the world, or laugh at it, to express itself with the necessary lucidity.

If conceptualism was finally seen as a return to good sense, it was because the 1980s hermeneutic anaemia retrospectively turned Tanztheater into a current besieged by thematic urgencies, hardly inclined to formalisms, semiotic breakdowns and astuteness of reason. No one suspected that Pina Bausch could have a metalinguistic agenda infinitely more vertiginous than any *non-danse*.

However, the choice at hand (between Tanztheater and conceptualism or minimalism) reproduces the same artifice that, in the 1930s — i.e., the roughest phase of the struggle for hegemony confronting German dance poetics — worsened the fracture between Kurt Jooss (putative father of the term Tanztheater)⁴ and the formalisms or mysticisms rooted in various titles in “rival” poetics such as Rudolf von Laban’s *Freie Tanz* (free dance) or Mary Wigman’s *Absoluter Tanz* (absolute dance): a kind of antithesis between purity and impurity — or between ideology and pragmatism.

An analysis that takes into account the plurality of *Café Müller*’s “semantic effects” as a consequence of formal and structural modes of processing will mainly help restore the complexity of a phenomenon like Tanztheater, to circumscribe its singularity, to define the formal effectiveness of its supposed “impurities” and to break down the less obvious reasons for its kinship with historical Tanztheater.

Especially noticeable is the multicoloured range of explanations on which the early criticism agreed: metalinguistic, autobiographical, womanist, sociological, psychiatric. It is as if this swarm of conjectures — all inconclusive — implicitly mocked the insistence on suggesting the exegesis of *Café Müller* upon thematic foundations, and it is surprising if we consider that because of its brevity (in comparison with the average length of Bausch’s *Stücke*) *Café Müller* affords an unrepeatable example of the transparency of the method.

The result of the analytical opacity was also to minimise the exegetic weight of the historical antecedents: by anecdotally presenting Bausch’s poetic debts to Kurt Jooss, the possible interpretation of 1980s Tanztheater as an “anachronistic” phenomenon and a correct exegesis of the functions of anachronism among its methods was overlooked. The 1978 piece was, so to speak, the first *lyrical poetry* wholly written in the *grammar* perfected by Bausch during a decade of experiments, exercises and declensions.

I will endeavour to show here that Tanztheater is less an algebraic sum of heterogeneous elements (theatre + dance) than the *dramatisation* of

4. The German compound word “Tanztheater” appeared in 1927 to describe a spectacular typology that was emerging and differing from the expressionist current. See: Müller et al., 1984; Servos, 2001.

phraseological, narratological and existential paradoxes inherent in dance in terms of gesture, genre and aim – dance mutation rather than hybridisation.

Therefore, two further demythologisations are needed. The first concerns the critical superstition that attributes the *message* with the most determining role in the characterisation of Pina Bausch's poetic work. This study does not aim, of course, to show the “absence of theme” but rather to qualify Tanztheater as a completely *formal* reaction to the paradox of the theme as absence, emergency, and “exanthema” of the danced sign. The second concerns the cultural and media superstition that describes Pina Bausch as a sentimental choreographer, instinctive and removed from formal calculations: a fantasy that, by retrospectively casting an ecumenical aura around Tanztheater, wraps the impressive arsenal of structural astuteness of Pina Bausch's poetic *atout* in a smoke cloud of affection.

1.

A conception of Tanztheater as metadiscourse – which inscribes the unease of life in a core discourse on dance unease and pathologies – is particularly fertile in relation to *Café Müller* as a “testamentary” piece. It should be remembered, however, that the “monumentalisation” of the *Stück* was, at least partly, an *après coup*, and that it was motivated by the unprecedented reception of a choreography conceived in its time as a specific piece rather than a manifesto.⁵

Café Müller retains unmistakable features of its circumstantial genesis: its length, its succinct number of performers and the label of *Stück* (piece), which Bausch would successively adopt for *all* creations of the Tanztheater Wuppertal. Conceived in record time,⁶ it is hard to believe that it could have been particularly “premeditated”, and even less so that it could wield a specific programme. It was more realistic for Bausch to tack together the piece with the most loyal performers and approach it as an “exercise in style”: recycling processes already used in *Blaubart* (1977) and other pieces from the 1970s and the “paradigmatic” development of those tools.

Hence the fundamental ambivalence of *Café Müller*: to be both a definitive Decalogue of theatre-dance methods and the most proverbially “unrepeatable” title of its genre. No piece has received more retrospective veneration from a host of epigones and successors. The 1980s and 1990s dance-theatre has to a large extent been a “nostalgic” current: its anachronism perpetuates a “grammar of nostalgia” or a “logic of loss” that already nested in the heart of the work-prototype, and that is still pending a theoretical breakdown.

5. *Café Müller* has singular origins: in the eleven previous months Bausch had produced three long pieces (*Komm tanz mit mir*, 1977; *Renate wandert aus*, 1977; *Er nimmt sie an der Hand und führt sie in das Schloss, die anderen folgen*, 1978). The new show was born to fill a void in the programme, in the framework of a kind of challenge between creators (Bausch herself, Hans Pop – at that time her assistant –, Gerhard Bohner and Gigi Caciuleanu), all of them invited to conceive a choreography entitled *Café Müller* in the scenographic framework designed by Rolf Borzik. The premiere of the four resulting pieces (Bausch's was presented last) took place on 20 May 1978 in Wuppertal.

6. In Wim Wenders' film, Malou Airaud and Dominique Mercy give a brief summary of the circumstances and times of the creation of *Café Müller*.

How can *Café Müller* be summarised? It is a space enclosed by three sides, the free interpretation of a reference point (public venue-café, restaurant, or also waiting room, meeting place, etc.) to which Bausch adds chairs and tables, with doors on both sides (and a revolving door in the back on the left); six *characters in search of a denominator* cross, come together, collide or *collude*, search themselves and get lost in this both mimetic and atypical space. This lack of a common denominator plunges the human figures of *Café Müller* into a kind of narratological pre-tuning (as if they came from different myths, or ballets, or gags, or jokes), and makes their interaction generally a kind of *interference*.

In virtue of this intermittence of deficient narratives, *telling* the story of Bausch's characters (if they are characters) is almost impossible. If it can only be traced through conjectures, it is because it is fed by gestures, outbursts, beginnings, allusions, aborted developments, false movements, false starts, nebulous endings, *stumbles*. At a very elementary level, *Café Müller* is nothing but a memorable apologue about the inconclusive and the uncomposed. Perhaps Federico Fellini was right when he said that Pina Bausch had produced her own *Otto e mezzo* (Bentivoglio, 1985: 99).

The exploits of Tanztheater correspond to this abysmal challenge of capturing the disappearance of the story (fictional *récit* and historical *grand récit*) before it is a fact; of addressing this disappearance less like an *eclipse* than an *ellipsis* of the tale — turned into shatters, relics, motifs —; and of considering that if there is a place to think about the phantasmagorical assembly of so many scraps, that place of posthumous care is dance. The silent dramaturgy of future decades comes from intuition itself. Its debt to Tanztheater is simply incalculable.

It is significant, in this respect, that the only group action of *Café Müller* (a non-incident meeting of the characters) is the only situation that suggests a convergence of all the stories — or the “false ending” — in which three seated people observe, under a very tenuous light, the body of a woman on the floor. This strange “funereal soirée” is interrupted by the explosive reaction of Dominique,⁷ who suddenly gets up, as if rejecting the act of re-composition that ends up *shrouding* the show in grief. The flight of the blond man means the failure of any hypothesis of settling or decompression of the dynamic set of desires, obsessions and aspirations that make up the poetics of the piece: in more than one sense it says with which *excesses* the action meets its potential *cessations*. And how its denominator is suspended or dispersed.

Love, friendship, death, contact, childhood, social neurosis, and personal and collective memory: the message of the piece, interwoven in a jungle of inklings of stories, is structurally irresolute. *Café Müller* is not a “thesis production”. Any exegetic spasm aimed at glimpsing in the characters the personifications or metonymies of something that is not eminently structural (that is a mere syntactical function of events) is bound to shortcomings or

7. Hereafter, for practical reasons (and to avoid an abuse of periphrases), I will refer to the “anonymous characters” of *Café Müller* with the proper names of the performers of the version marketed on video: Pina (Bausch), Malou (Airaudo), Dominique (Mercy), Nazareth (Panadero), Jan (Minarik) and Jean (Sasportes).

simplification. There is no other show in which the very notion of character manages to appear so premeditatedly out of focus.

Nevertheless, the system of contiguities developed by the piece suggests at all times something like a paradoxical coherence, a cryptic “compactness” that, although it does not make up a story, does unquestionably make up a world, or a system of occurrences. The characters here are never entirely dispossessed of the theorem that tries to include them and spin their corollaries almost at the expense of all of them. Their humanity comes, in short, from the resistance or the reticence of each one to the precession and logical *pressure* of that theorem. We will have to discover what theorem it is.

Beyond the sentimentalism endorsed by literary and audiovisual documents (Bentivoglio, 1985: 98-99; Hoghe, 1987: 69-73; Servos, 2001: 85-88), the fact that the critical mapping of *Café Müller* is so often wrecked in a very general theory of love or death mainly depends on the dowry of functional dichotomies or couplings spread, like false clues, throughout the piece. It is likely that the most basic couplings emerge as poetic axioms, “operative” conditions of *Café Müller*; others are, so to speak, operational effects: dichotomies or super-symmetries that the piece wields as logical consequences of the action. The spectator of *Café Müller* is witness to this endeavour of arrangement and self-compensation of a world whose six inhabitants all, at first, possess an antagonist or member, with whom they share — by analogy or by opposition — a function, a task, or an emotion: Malou and Dominique as a couple; Jan and Jean as a functional duo; Pina and Nazareth as a formal contrast. However, what moves *Café Müller* is Bausch’s strategy of entangling each character in a relationship of dualism or binariety with *each* of the others: each subject will be part — spontaneously or forcedly — of five *synolos*, of five “couplings” that go back to different orders of similarity or contrast, of analogy or opposition. Malou will make a “system”, or example, with Dominique (who is her lover), with Pina (who is her double), with Jean (who stops her from hurting herself), with Jan (who moves her the most), with Nazareth (who is her rival).

Some of the couplings are so apparently artificial that they are presented as *lapsus*, “automatisms” of the system: this is the case of the passage in which, towards the end, Jan crosses the stage reproducing the nervous gait typical of Nazareth, and is read as a *gratuitous and necessary* effect (such are *lapsus*) of the tendency to create or force *bridges* of reciprocity between the characters.

2.

Almost none of the symmetries, analogies, dichotomies or couplings of *Café Müller* take place through an encounter (or a relationship). Their genuine dimension will be, perhaps, an extensive phenomenology of the *failure to meet*: physical clash, aborted closeness, desynchronisation. Malou and Dominique’s duo best exemplifies here these “pathologies” of interaction.

If *Café Müller* actually speaks correctly of the aporias of love, it is because the dissolution of the *pas à deux* format is in its turn almost a structural

endeavour of Tanztheater's poetics. In *Café Müller* there are two situations or attempts at a *pas à deux* in a traditional sense. The former (the famous embrace "intervened" by Jan) is doubly aborted: because the embrace, static and definitive, at the end of Malou's solo recalls the denouement of a kinetic event rather than the start of another; and because Dominique's and Malou's next "dance" is, phenomenologically, the effect of a freeze (the embrace), which insists on being reconstituted. The resulting *vicious circle* — which replaces the whole phraseology of the danced encounter — could be defined as a form, unseen until the 1970s, of *pathology of the pas à deux*.

The second case is the long series of reciprocal *portés* that enables Malou and Dominique to cross the space towards the left, until, lacking a subsequent space to advance, continue to mutually clash on the wall. A gesture of absolute reciprocity ("transporting themselves" lovingly from one point to another) becomes another conflictive automatism, another phraseological asphyxia of a *pas à deux*.

The "dystopias of contact" staged by Bausch are the European counterpart to those "utopias of contact" that almost in the same years, as a result of the reorganisation of the poetics after the shipwreck of the 1960s protest movements, occupied the core of the programme of the American avant-gardes, to end in the "existential" forms of the Contact Improvisation (Paxton, 1975: 40-42; Banes, 1979: 11-25; Novack, 1999). Contact and Tanztheater shared at least one concern: to cast out an "enclave of contacts" (a *Kontaktthof*) enabling the expression — if not the *Gestaltic* therapy — of the relational deficit that postmodern society apparently suffered from. Paxton provided the most optimistic version (maximising contact as a relational and formal panacea) of this hypothesis of haptic intensification, and Bausch the most pessimistic (maximising it as a reason for clash and shipwreck of any relation).

Jacques Lacan's aphorism that there is *no sexual relationship* is well-known, because the logics, negotiations and equidistances of relationality would not be able to reconcile with the para-logics, the unseizable sharing of power and darkness that feeds our sexuality.

Contact and Tanztheater manage to formalise this paradox in highly paradoxical *pas à deux* typologies: that of Paxton hypertrophying the relational element, replacing empowerment and liability with new parameters of *responsivity* (with the result of a blurred, unconcluded, de-genitalised eroticism); that of Bausch interpreting relationality *verbatim*: the scene in which Malou and Dominique mutually embed themselves in the wall is in the end the nightmarish version of the peer group norm of the "I'll do to you everything you do to me" (with the result of a confused, blocked eroticism close to rape). The *love story* of the Contact did not know how to end, and the narrated *love story* of Tanztheater knew nothing *other than* to end. One did not strictly have a beginning and an ending. The other had nothing more than beginnings and endings.

In *Café Müller* there is almost no encounter that does not analogously relate to some anomaly of contact: clash, rubbing, stumble, collision, hit, fight; and there is no anomaly of this kind that does not implicitly disturb the "differential" logic that in current contacts clearly shares the roles between one

subject and one object: the objects are challenged with the subjective faculty of “standing in the way”; the subjects are inflicted with manipulations of an objectual nature; and in human interactions, the symmetry and synchrony usually related to the encounter between subjects either do not take place or take place in the form of a violent over-performance. This occurs because contact, in Tanztheater, always gives away an almost Schopenhauerian nostalgia of objectification (the desire for the other to be *really* there where he or she is sensed): chained to a congenital insufficiency of subjectivity, it comes in the end from the longing to find out that *the other*, in all its forms, is just enactment.

The solitude of the characters in *Café Müller* comes from this shipwreck of intersubjectivity. Even the most altruistic action (that of Jean moving the chairs and tables that threaten Malou or Dominique at his own risk) cannot be strictly described as an inter-subjective stage, because far from establishing frames of real encounter with the other, it consists of guarding and reconstituting an emptiness that enables the other not to find the winding object of his or her longing (and not to find oneself).

Perhaps this search for the clash is the genuinely Bauschian way of adapting the philosophical instance (Hegelian before, Heideggerian later) to a metadiscursive frame that the *Da-sein*, the “being-here” that determines the existential statutes of each one, can only be experienced through traumatic means. Existence only takes on *consistency* in the violent friction with the deaf *factuality* of the world. The world appears as a lonely one by confronting us with our state of exposition and expulsion, and it manages this by resisting our actions, desires, enactments, projections, drives, and so on. The world *reality* comes essentially from the Latin *res* (thing), also the root of the verb *res-ist*.

Thus, the impact with reality will be terrible but necessary so that each person measures the existential boundaries of their place in the world, or knows what place *to be* of this world. Love itself would be similar to an existential protocol of wounding and wounding ourselves in order to test and ensure our reality and that of the other; and of hastily sacrificing both realities to the phantom, when they contradict or *resist* our projections. Acting like someone who pretends to ignore the material impediments, Malou and Dominique are a perfect kinetic *exemplum* of this notion of the subject as concoction of innocence and experience: between *being without world* and *existing in a world*; between *getting lost in a space* and *finding oneself in a place*.

In this world of reiterated compulsions, useless outbursts and gratuitous acts, the only “truces” are, paradoxically, the segments danced. If everything “theatrical” complies with the rule of eagerness, there is no dance in Bausch’s universe that is not *katapausis*, suspension, distension of the language of dance in its *comfort zone* or an opportunity to hold on to the certainties that that language represents, as a set of technical skills, professional achievements and acquired abilities.⁸ The “danced dance”, a venal repertoire of lost

8. A good example of all of them is the memorable sequence of *Nelken* (1982) in which Dominique Mercy cries out for the stage to be clear so that he can exhibit himself, and then childishly boasts to the audience about the academic *entrechats* and *déboulés* he can perform.

or oversized certainties, plays the extraordinarily dialectic role here of an “innocent guilt” or, depending on how you see it, a “guilty innocence”: a skilful ornament that comforts, *beatifies* the arbitrary interval, the *existential vacancy* (almost a *vacation*) between us and the thickness of reality.

All the choreographic sequences of *Café Müller* are *attempts*, “beginnings of dances”, inchoative formulae, that forge mere collision as a “metaphysical” alternative. Malou only dances when, by frustrating the “libido of clash” that drives her effusion, Jean creates a sufficiently wide emptiness around her. Never has the delirium of de-realisation incurred by the subject when his or her drive to exist does not find enough *de-finitions* in the objective correlative of the space been embodied more strongly: an ephemeral suspension, in whose desire to leave reality there already beats an irresistible instinct to return to it; or a regressive delirium, because it endorses the feeling that dancing means replacing the here and now with an inner dimension made only of memory, fantasy, hope and other “temporal figures”.

If Malou’s gesture of dismay is valid at the start of “O Let Me Weep” (which will oblige her to start again), beginning to dance will be equal to sinking into a kind of self-hypnosis that does not coexist with the present, and its physicality is expressed in conflictive terms. Moved by the whim of escaping the trauma of immanence, and deligitimised by an excess of transcendence, this dance that proliferates in the ins and outs of the action and of the world is not only imperfect ecstasy but also a *denied stasis*: it expresses the irresistible nostalgia of what interrupts it. *By dancing to avoid immobility we dance to immobility*.

And when we cherish the possibility of a *katapausis* shared with the beloved, it is this unprecedented consistency to confront new threats or temptations of inconsistency; to sabotage again a dance that, essentially, was a *dance à deux* only when no one danced it. Dance mainly enunciates the lack of existential content that it wishes to express: because it comes from the pneumatic vacuum of a subjectivity without contours (the *emptied* space to save us the trauma of existing) — and this makes it insufficient —; or of the fragile perishable plenitude of love (the space *filled* by absolute resistance, the too real reality of the beloved) — and this makes it impossible. *Its innocence is not self-sufficient*.

For a modernity that has longed for invocations to the natural and the somatic, the turning point of Tanztheater is to present dance less as a *consented physics* than a *denied or interrupted “metaphysics”*: the image of Martin Heidegger’s *Lichtungen* (clearings of Being): privileged instants in which the thickness of the world half-opens to *give way* to an “area of light in the woods”, in which the Being can hold on to its fleeting plenitude, appearing as “that which disappears”, giving itself as “that which is rejected” (Heidegger, 2007: 71-72). The forest of tables and chairs is, in *Café Müller*, a forest of the same type. There is the same distance between Existing — correlative and “needed” — and Being — necessary and absolute — as there is, in Pina Bausch, between an impulsive crash and the drive to dance.

The “clearings” between chairs and tables are no other than “tamed” reviviscence, between irony and pessimism, of the fancy that in the 1920s

pushed the ideologists of the *Körperkultur* to pursue a syntonic and performative convergence of the community in the natural openings of the landscape (Casini Ropa, 1990). *Café Müller* presents the residual form, the failure of that confidence that the legendary homogeneity of *Volk* and Race, Culture and Nature, Nation and Territory, individual and collective could be danced.

While the motley ideological utopia of the *Freilichtbühne* (theatre, stadium, temple of dance) ratified the role of dance as *shared ontology*, Bausch's dystopia, made of inklings of dance and frantic solitudes in the in-betweens of cheap furniture, reflects the breakdown of any ontology of rooting: an open wound between subject and world, whose most piercing result is, at first, the *uncertainty* of all dance.⁹

In the *Stücke* the floor often seems “difficult” for dance:¹⁰ the reddish earth of *Frühlingsopfer* (1975), the fallen leaves of *Blaubart* (1977), the marshes of *Arien* (1979), the grass of *1980* (1980), the carnations of *Nelken* (1983),¹¹ the strewn soil of *Auf dem Gebirge hat man ein Geschrei gehört* (1984), the waste of *Palermo Palermo* (1991),¹² the snow of *Tanzabend II* (1991).

The bric-à-brac of *Café Müller* is an illustrious shoot of this sceneographic lineage. The 20th century praxis meant “flattening” floors and neutralising obstacles: the fact that this taste for emptiness was linked to an endeavour for abstraction (resettling dance in a geometric or biological *infinitum* — “without history”), strengthened the disturbing kinship between that Space, worshipped by pre-war German dance, and the coeval ideology of the *Lebensraum* or “living space”: the Nazi idea that the extensive eastern colonies — Poland and the Soviet Union —, once purged of the races that wrongly occupied them, were vast fields of biopolitical cultivation, open to the free proliferation and self-expression of the Aryan “body”. The Labanian “temple of dance” — glass dome, in which the *Volk* would chorally dance the eternal *new beginning* of its natural history as a race, and the *end of all political history* would be a collective synecdoche of this space that seeks to be cosmic and ahistorical. The fact that, 40 years later, Bausch chooses to *un-obviate dance* by removing it “from roots” — the complications of the floor corrode any guarantee that dance is a legitimate, obvious or pleasant a priori —, and that by condemning dance to this symbolic limping it echoes the same instinct that had persuaded Brecht to attack the thaumaturgic aspects of the theatre illusion, to dismantle its protocols of credulity, seems like nemesis.

Jooss' *Tanztheater* did not adopt theatrical modes by devotion to scenic illusions but out of interest in some “disillusion” tools that theatre was already honing at a time when dance elevated the demand of “being believed a priori” to religious levels.

9. Some of Bausch's statements on the pragmatic sacrifice of a large portion of the choreographic material considering the premieres also refer to this “melancholic” delegitimisation of dance, and to the melancholia of having to revoke it to the benefit of most explicit and less obliging signs (Bentivoglio, 1993, p. 165).

10. It is a trend common to the two main set designers of the company, Rolf Borzik (Pina Bausch's husband) and Peter Pabst (who succeeded Borzik when he died). It is also significant that, in the original version of the *Stück*, Borzik was in charge of moving the chairs and tables during the show, in the role that after his death Jean Sasportes would inherit.

11. The first version, untitled, was presented in Wuppertal in 1982.

12. The first version, with the provisional title *Das Palermo-Stück*, was presented in Wuppertal in 1990.

Bausch fulfils the corollaries of this promise of “disambiguation” by forcing dance to an implacable existential self-criticism, to a violent confrontation with itself. Jooss adapts dance to the expression of a ferocious incredulity at the thamaturgies of the real world; Bausch adapts the world to the expression of a ferocious incredulity at the secular thaumaturgies of dance.

Everybody will remember some episodes of the cartoon *Coyote and Roadrunner*. At the end of a crazy persecution of the Roadrunner, Coyote unwittingly overruns the edge of a precipice. Until he realises there is no ground, he continues running in the emptiness. When the force of inertia runs out, he looks down perplexed and just then, when he notices the abyss, he falls ruinously.

Perhaps for dance Tanztheater was the moment when it looked down and, when suddenly losing the blind confidence in the possibility of continuing to dance in the emptiness, it began to throw itself into the abyss of reality, into the accident that, precisely by challenging its right to exist, made it exist.

Until the day of that existential clash, this “falling into a realisation”, the signs of dance could negotiate a fluctuating relationship with the world, could be a comforting enactment, dissimulate with *vitality* its sporting ignorance of *life*. The layer of earth of Bausch’s *Rite of Spring* (*Frühlingsopfer*, 1975), an allusion to the climate of wild telluric worship of the libretto, also represented the fate of a world whose dance, collective liturgies and violent ideologies find in the Earth — like a representative of insidious abstractions such as Nature, the Territory, Race, People — its most powerful idol: a “passion for the Real”, so delirious as to sacrifice to it any reality and give murder a religious aura. For the solo of the Chosen to express this reticence of the living body to “be danced until death”, Bausch multiplied the protocols of mutual friction, of imbalance between the body and its dance, between dance and its floor. And she created the first solo repertoire whose “mistakes”, wastes of energy, undue accelerations, delays and *stumbles* are entirely choreographed.

Far from delving into an ecstasy of de-individualisation, the sacrificial victim *resists* here *the dance that resists the victim*. The stumble at the start of the solo summarises this profound poetic scepticism faced with the bloody irrelevance of the absolutes: a thesis on the unsuitability of everything alive to both generalities, an overly “abstract” dance — an overly “concrete” life. *Frühlingsopfer* was less the last “traditional” choreography of Pina Bausch, before Tanztheater, than the start of a poetic shift destined to be completed in *Café Müller*.

The enigmatic, almost totemic, presence of animals (real or fictitious) in the *Stücke* of the 1980s (crocodiles in *Keuschheit slegende*, a hippopotamus in *Arien*, an embalmed fawn in *1980*, a mechanical horse in *Kontakt Hof*, a polar bear in *Tanzabend II*, a poodle in *Palermo Palermo*, fish in *Danzn*, etc.) thematises this existential fracture between performers and environment.

These animals, chosen for their complete disconnection with the language and conventions of dance, are the only creatures symbolically suited to move with grace and synchrony in environments that are problematic for any dancing body. They recall the dedication “aux animaux” in Louis-Ferdinand

Céline's last novel:¹³ in a scenario of civilisation tamed by human stupidity, the only “dance” is the adaptative unconsciousness, the paradoxical harmony that animals and idiots express (Céline, 1969; Muray, 1981: 148-162).

The consequences of this sceneographic gesture for the material statutes of dance are countless: decades of idle pursuits about the *Space* (and of visual deeds to absolutise it — use of the black box, gradual abolition of visual decors and of any device of *contention* or *de-finition* of the scene —) are supplanted in Tanztheater by the unprecedented supremacy of the notion of *Place*.¹⁴ Bausch's *Hof* will embody all the functions and limits that modernist typologies tried to neutralise: relativity (the Space was intended to be absolute); temporality (the Space was intended to be instantaneous and timeless); finitude (the Space was intended to be infinite); density (the Space was intended to be empty).

Full of things and grooved by thousands of dynamic abuses, the visual enclaves staged by Bausch are transitional settings visited by bodies that do not belong to them, and that are literally out of place.

As happens with the disused objects (Orlando, 2015), the memorial burden that they matured bounds them to be saturated with spectres and impregnations, signs of neglect and phantasmal behaviours. And while the “spaces” of modernity guard the *immemoriality* of the danced gesture and the sacred immanence of the dancing body, we need only to look at the damaged furniture of *Café Müller*, at the stamped on carnations of *Nelken*, at the ploughed earth of *Frühlingsopfer*, to conclude that Bausch's dream is a place that, collecting traces of the action like a chaotic archive, becomes a surface of memorial inscription, extension of time, duration. Bausch's spatiality is once again outlined by mistaken time, by desynchronisation.

3.

How far can this structural anachronism also be read as a premeditated posture in terms of the history of dance?

Complicating dance for the human creature — an animal afflicted with self-awareness — is Bausch's version of a *V-effekt*. Dance *appears* and *is objectified*, as a result of the res-istence of everything that, materially or symbolically, should support it. From now on the physical and mental approval to dance will only be achieved with some effort. Dance will be condemned, after decades of mystical absolutism, to all kinds of relativism and subjectivism.

13. The interest in dance is a keynote of Céline's literary career, as shown both by his extensive use of kinetic and musical metaphors and his always neglected desire to become a ballet librettist one day. The analogy between the journey of the I-narrator in his final novel, *Rigodon* (1969), through the pitted landscapes of Northern Europe and Bausch's obsession (so evident in pieces such as *Frühlingsopfer*, *Arien*, *Auf dem Gebirge...*, *Die Klage der Kaiserin*) to walk through with all kinds of *Reigen* or round dances the lots and empty grounds — the dystopic “clearings of the Non-Being” that recalled, still in the 1970s, the bombings of the last war.

14. The same notion will prove to be decisive for the spatial statuses and set design customs of postmodern dance. Notions and formats so distanced such as the *choreographic device*, the *site-specific work* and the *choreographic installation* will be related to it. The gradual eclipse of the *black box* and the praxis of leaving the stage infrastructure (a real dance cliché from the 1990s) finally exposed involuntarily rest on the poetic instinct of not only showing the theatrical *place* for what it is but because of its flaws and memories of use; in other words, for the “anachronistic” device it is.

Fantatised as absolute action, it will be reduced to highly relative actions: gesture, if not *gesticulation*. The *suspension of disbelief* that is the fictional pact of historical dance succumbs to the suspicion that dancing is not an activity justified a priori by a specific, that its framework is not compact enough to legitimise the defects of realism that it includes: *the hidden subject of all its subjects*, it ceases to be a formal peaceful option and becomes, so to speak, a content-zip — what, by definition, after so many litanies about *appearance* and *presence* — *forges a worldly existence of disappearances and absences*.

The causes of this inversion of perspective are to be found in 20th century German history. Post-war Germany had calculatedly obliterated any cultural legacy that could remind it of the drifts of the 1930s, including the technical, theoretical and poetic legacy of an *Ausdruckstanz xxx* whose ideology was seen as too contextual to totalitarian aberrations to overcome unharmed the dismantling of the Nazi status quo. Not even Kurt Jooss escaped this prudential oblivion.

For decades, the legacy of the *Ausdruckstanz xxx* only survived, subliminally, in the outlying areas of the market and in pedagogical citadels like the *Folkwang Hochschule* in Essen, the *Mary-Wigman-Studio* in West Berlin or the *Tanzschule Gret Palucca* in Dresden: almost the only form of survival of a tradition almost eclipsed by the stunning ascension of the great established ballets (Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Hamburg, etc.). The blooming of contemporary Tanztheater, and its assertion of a label that dated back to the 1930s, was contextual to the ideological shift of the German student protests, and the indignation with which the new generations denounced the unpaid moral debts of the previous generation calling for an obligation of memory that cannot be extended. The fact that those who had not personally experienced the totalitarian period repeated such assertions endorsed a generalised tendency to subordinate the insurrectional legacy of the protest movements to a *resurgence* of ghosts of the past, expressed in “symptomatic” terms; in other words, violent, paradoxical or overacted (“aesthetic” in a sense very typical of '68); it meant at root opposing the *reality* stipulated by the German economic miracle, the episodic eruptions and abjections of that *Real* that the nation only knew how to look at askance.

Some writers had highlighted the psychological implications of this mass act of memorial omission and had attributed to women a unique role in the care of bad memories and the inherent guilt complexes: they represented that “thoughtful” half of German society in which the national complex was manifested with dystopic or pathological features long before students turned the motifs of depression into guidelines for protest. Böll's *Frauen vor Flußlandschaft* (Women in a River Landscape, 1985), analyses with vibrant precision how the moral anachronism and the feeling of being unsuited to the present worked on the mental life of a generation of German women. The role of the next generation of women in the protest movements and their occasional leadership in the hierarchy of armed struggle during the *Years of Lead* are part of the same phenomenon. It is no less true that, if the women terrorists also chose armed revolution as a symptomatic way out of the

scandal over the phenomenon of historical oblivion, Pina Bausch and others women-artists who led the adventure of Tanztheater were no less motivated by the task of “symptomatically” re-updating the poetic legacy of the 1930s and the trauma of loss it meant.

By re-presenting a universe of signs in pathological or phantasmal terms, they compiled and shook up the great neurotic repertoire of a society that had emerged from bad patches of memory and lots of old bombardments: hurt, astounded, absurd, childish, tragic (or tragically happy), and seriously out of tune with the present. Hence Bausch's extraordinary loyalty to a wardrobe and aesthetic of the places that seem slightly outdated, as if their human fauna were carried back to stage desires, impulses and fancies, to a indefinitely preterit time, missing dance as a relic of a collective history, or an amulet of a personal history: there is no more piercing ambivalence. Thematising dance becomes a poetic and existential task of the greatest urgency. If it means pointing in dance to a potential revocation of reality, it also means pointing in reality to a potential challenge for dance and thus confronting in an “unreconciled” dialectics two signs fatally bound to be reciprocally removed — or unmasked. Tanztheater re-presented dance in the form of an “emerging anachronism” — a distorted echo of a general and individual preterit.

And thus it managed to be the first genuinely European expression of modern dance (after decades of emulations of American models) and the first expression of postmodernism: symptom and achievement at the wrong time of a trauma of modernity, and *of modernity as a trauma*. Its slogan would be to always dance the symptoms of reality, and *realise* the symptoms of dance.

We must hence undo the mass rhetorical marketing that, with the connivance of Tanztheater Wuppertal and its guardians, has stubbornly ascribed Bausch's poetics to a comforting kinship between Dance and Truth. In the clinical sense, the symptomatic event does not deliver its truth (pathology, complex, neurosis) but rather disguises it and, in many aspects, *formalises* it, in a deceitful or ostentatious way. The symptom reveals the psychical background from which it comes only by *belying it*, or expressly *renouncing* it. And if it sprouts (paraphrasing Georges Didi-Huberman) from a “remote history” (painful core of everyone's psyche), it does not enunciate this story, this *deed*, which *gesticulates* the unrecognisable variety of its waste; applying to the traces of this “discontinued” lived psychic experience the same procedures of serialisation, condensation and displacement that make up the psychical performance of the *Traumarbeit* (the dreamwork) according to Freud (Didi-Huberman, 2009: 284-301).

Hence the most radical paradox of Tanztheater: *dance becomes a fragment, moment, splinter or gesture of life not because it inherits from the supposed truth of the gestures that make up everyone's life but because, like all these gestures (all of them symptoms), it comes from a self-deception, a salvific lie; and like all of them, it hides the traumatic root of its existential truth in the very instant in which it expresses it, with the outcome of perpetuating it, of suspending its solution; each one can hold to this lie with conviction or emotion, and be honest in it, “living without living in itself.”*

Bausch's dance thus becomes the *oblique* (*figural*, if Jean-François Lyotard's definition holds) dimension in which any discrimination between what is true and what is false is weakened (Lyotard, 1971; Schefer, 1999); in which the individual is existentially the intersection of two false truths (dance and life) which mutually contradict each other in order to be able, at some point, to come together or carry off their respective places.

Iteration is the symptomatic umbrella under which this dialectic is more clearly forged.

In the early 1980s repetition became a vogue. Seduced by minimalist music and the operational recipes of the late post-modern dance, European choreography took on the challenge of limiting itself to a processing of compact phraseological units or blocks (bits of gestural information or *actomes*), which, by modulating a succinct set of choreographic materials, yields some variety of formal outcomes. Carried out with a patience close to obstinacy, this type of repetition (almost a sampling) then used by Keersmaeker, matched a sample of *arithmetical progression*: it does not denote any emotional obstinacy; the object of its "serial production" is not a "semantic" but rather a formal thesis; it does not operate by returns of image but by duplications of a diagram (*resetting* rather than restarting); there are no traces of inchoation or "decision" in the beginnings of its processing, or resignation in its ending.

Bausch's case is the opposite: iteration, return and redundancy seem to here match a sample of reset or "reflux" that, by definition, is the *modus operandi* of the symptom: they will make us think more of obsessive-compulsive disorders than calculus operations. The stubborn repetition of the same gestures gives way to a *geometrical and exponential progression*, with an *intensive* look very different to the *extensive* breakdown of materials characteristic of minimalism (Fratini, 2012: 75-100).

Bausch saturates the semantic potential of repetitions by taking them to exasperating levels of paroxysm with escalation of speed and energy, or unnaturally multiplying the performers of the same action. The result of both operations is a radical alteration of the original meaning of the action, the gesture or the image. If the hasty "returns of the identical" of some of Bausch's gags are not an ironic impugnation of this Nietzschean myth, perhaps they are the breakdown of the true nature of this myth, which, in the end, formalised the 19th-century bourgeoisie's nostalgia for the eclipse of their gestural universe, and the instinct to recover it as *sacrament*, which would provide the backbone for the Duncanian adventure (Agamben, 1996). The deliriums of insistence of Bausch's characters are just a tumultuous *de profundis* on praying, the "archaeo-gestural" illusion that presided over the birth of modern dance.

The aforementioned gag by Malou, Jan and Dominique (embrace—change of posture—fall—embrace), performed at first slowly, is reproduced at least nine times with growing rapidity and frenzy. At the end of the sequence, the panting couple reproduces the whole cycle of gestures at an unnaturally accelerated pace, as in a nightmare, without even the assistance (or nuisance) of Jan. And finally they perform it very slowly until, despite

the efforts of Dominique to hold her, Malou's umpteenth fall separates the lovers.

The entire duo consists exclusively of repeated efforts aimed at integrating contradictory images: it is interference in its pure state, and the chronic display, the *continuity*, fabricated and intermittent, of a figure of *contiguity* — *an experienced allegory*. Walter Benjamin would speak of “dialectic image” (or whirlpool-image) (Didi-Huberman, 2006: 137-213).

Neither is it by chance that the thresholds of the process here are such antithetical “photographs”: encounter and loss, start and end. The first is fated (Malou “runs into” Dominique advancing blindly at the end of her first solo), the second is “fatal” in a more literal meaning, and evoking a specific calamity, which is perhaps the death of the beloved.

The formal deed consists here above all of submitting the gestures and life to *de-figuration* of a metadiscursive scope in a veiled way: thus revealing its absurdity (as if the iteration unveiled the neurotic doubts even of the widest images of affection), but also turning them, as a result of the automation or coactions, into splinters of action so unlinked from their primitive motives, so terminally abstract, that can only finally be performed and imagined as dance steps, *figures* in a specific and terminal sense: the neutralisation of any initial dichotomy between truth and falseness, between the presumably reliable image to which it seeks to return, and to the presumably lying image that is sought to be undone.

Each repetition will entail the uncontrollable deterioration of the experiential plenitude of the “overly human” drive to repeat the gestures; a decrease of its inchoative intensity — the increasingly less credible copy of a vital prototype. Only an increase of rage will compensate this “deflation of life” and meaning: the semantic space that vacates the gradual loss of vitality and meaning will be almost invariably saturated with rage, or imbued with a sinister substitutive *jouissance*.¹⁵ The tenderest frictions, the most delicate ardours, will lead to substitute forms of rape.

As in a centrifuge whose acceleration and cycles filter the signs of life to separate the signifier of the gesture from its existential signified, however much these *circular fixations* awaken comic impressions (applied to “vain” gestures from the outset) or tragic impressions (applied to emotively “necessary” gestures), the end of the process is always consummated in the sign of an automation: neither the primitive nor the unmasked absurdity remain of the gesture, but just the formal “mask”, emancipated from any semantic debts: the existential *motive* turned into a dance *motif*.

The gestures, *undermined* by repetition at any price, make up a terminal lexicon of “available shapes”: steps, figures, interactions available from

15. The *Kontakthof* sequence in which a crowd of males preterintentionally “rapes” Meryl Tankard inflicting on her an affectionate or cordial fondling that affects all the parts of her body except the erogenous parts belongs to the first type. In *Blaubart*, the obsession of the male protagonist (Jan Minarik) with constantly interrupting and playing again musical phrases related to gestures that he irresistibly wishes to repeat belongs to the second protocol. Minarik greets these moments of regressive pleasure, these demiurgic coactions to be repeated with childish slaps of joy. At the end of the show, the exhaustion of the sound recording will be followed by an endless series of these slaps, all of them used as sound switches that give the dance corps the order of mechanically reproducing any “snapshot” of the show.

now on to all kinds of successive modulation. This isolated waste and attempts, links in chains of meaning already dissolved and formal reminders of something lost, will flow back perhaps in more couplings and combinations, ulterior contiguities and brand new allegories, always able to endure being “recycled” by the performance’s *Traumarbeit*.

Reminders of this kind are very frequent in the final part of *Café Müller*: Dominique meets, embraces and loses Malou again several times: the last time without even stopping completely automatically.

The musical dramaturgy of *Café Müller* is also related to this poetic economy of reiterations. Here Bausch chooses, exceptionally, vocal pieces by a single baroque composer, Henry Purcell, all of them in ground bass: a musical form in which the continuous bass – the harmonic foundation of the score – is replaced by a motif that is stubbornly performed again and again. Upon this scheme that the left tirelessly repeats, the right will plot an evolving melodic pattern. The hypnotic relation between the obstinacy of the bass and the sudden melodic change that the chant has gradually spun is similar to the contradiction that Bausch’s repetitions conjure between consistency of the gestural form and excursion from the meaning: repeated obstinately, the gesture *sings* all its phantoms. The foundation upon which, also in pathology, the diversity and metamorphosis of the symptom rests is the repetition of the pattern, of the problem, the underlying *complex*. Our psychical biography is the false movement of an unconscious structure whose message *is emphasised*, concealed, in a thousand symptomatic variations: a thousand experiential melodies flourish upon its obstinacy.

Thus, far from being just a leitmotiv, Malou and Dominique’s embrace is a real choreographic *exemplum* of a *fixed idea*. The mental world of *Café Müller* is a selected repertoire of “imperative snapshots” – images, attitudes, situations – to which the characters compulsively return, like animals to their burrows, to escape arduous or awkward dynamics.¹⁶ These kinds of situations – in which the behaviour “coils” around one of its redundancies – often urge a relative viscosity in the general action. In the *Stück*, the *task-oriented work* of Jean and Jan refers almost exclusively to this ulterior type of resistance. The angels of medieval cosmology guaranteed, skilfully intervening in the laziness of the matter, the motion of this universe and its History towards some *telos* in eternity. Jean and Jan, operators of a device that reduces the stories that cross it to signs, analogously take charge of eliminating the blockages that stop *Café Müller* from advancing towards its fulfilment. If Jean is the *intervener* of the space, Jan is undoubtedly the *intervener*, the *unblocker*, of the time of the performance. Absurdly, his only reason for opposing the embrace of Malou and Dominique with the image of mourning is to force the couple to leave their fixation and consent, literally, to the continuation of the show.

Whether we think of the silent “dance” between Jan and Dominique, in which Jan moves backwards pulling Dominique anchored on his knees to a

16. The range of fixations of Malou and Dominique is the most extensive: the embrace; Malou’s pose prostrated on the background table; the “collision” of Malou and Dominique falling on the floor bent over; Dominique’s kneeling pose, holding Jan’s hands standing in a ballroom dance figure; Malou walking as if feeling a surface with her feet.

point on the floor — Dominique will recover the original pose twice, adhering once again to Jan's legs — or of the sequence in which Jan “displaces” Dominique at least twice, like a statue, to deposit him in different stages of an invisible journey, in both these cases, Jan *mobilises the still image of someone*; changing its place means moving it in time, patching up its discontinuity, re-establishing it in the flow of the future.

The status of these snapshots like *stumbles* of something experienced whose *autisms* “charm” the diachrony is such that Bausch even uses them as “measurements of the space”, as if she mapped the place according to symptomatic yardsticks. Some images will appear indifferent to changes of location and context, as if the obsessive dowry were also their only way of moving and being: Bausch seeks in some moments to drastically *relocalise* the same action (“knocking down” gestures that had been presented standing up; or transferring to a vertical support — mainly to the walls — *simple actions* such as Malou's walk).

The symptom adapts to the space of the most paradoxical form possible: by ignoring it, because of its unbeatable materiality the space *resists* the symptom without modifying its shape: limiting it, containing it. At the end of his second solo Dominique moves towards the wall on the right with a repeated phrase (almost a *walking step*) of arms and legs; when there is no room left, Dominique continues to perform the phraseological module “shortened” by the wall that he finally hits with his whole body, as if his formula of displacement survived by inertia and compulsion.

If some Tanztheater repetitions seem slapstick it is because this friction between the materiality of the space and the “automation” of the gesture recalls Bergson's theory about laughter as an instinctive exorcism of the concern awakened by any impression of *mechanisation* of the human (Bergson, 2013: 37-66), which takes place when out of distraction a living body *continues to do what it was doing* unaware of hindrances and traps (Wile E. Coyote); or loses any kinetic and organic self-control (laughing at falls, shit, death and sex are related to this category).

The so-called *Bausch-Reigen* (Gradinger, 1999) appears as an epitome of this comic-absurd side of repetition: a sinuous parade of the company through the stage and, occasionally, the theatre stalls. This *Fellinian* troupe or *rigodon*, calculatedly prolix and performed with dance music (a *petite musique*, as Céline would call it), usually features a malicious sequence of gestural trifles repeated by all the performers through the journey: a set of relational tics, formulas of courtesy, expressions of social narcissism, tender affectations, puerile gestures and self-indulgencies of all kinds.

The conga of the social and relation clichés, with its ferociously joyful repetition of manners that dance turns decorative, becomes the *ballet* of a whole group dancing eagerly, on their way to death, its legacy of *vanities*, its foolishness “approved by music” (paraphrasing an apothegm by Albert Camus) and, ultimately, its *Totentanz*. Tanztheater, thus playing, in a subtle boundary between mourning and joy, between fate and whim, is at root applying the “fatal strategy” that Jean Baudrillard championed some years later: whoever assumes the paradox of following a stranger in the street

copying for hours all his or her paths and movements will realise that any gesture, as long as its motivation is unknown, is absurd (Baudrillard, 2007: 120-122); in any human gesture nests a “fatal” logic, an alienated form of life and a suspended causality that are, in the end, those of dance.

While Jooss invoked the historical *danse macabre* to make death's talent to synchronise the merry-go-round of human aspirations and failures look like a choreo-dramaturgical performance, Bausch formulates her own *revival* as an *understatement*. In the *Reigen* ballroom dance, her *Totentanz* supports a somewhat disheartening thesis: if dance is conceived like this, as a mimetic casting of life and an enlivening of its gestures, it will be strictly speaking the most “theatrical” of Dance-theatre, the sign that absorbs, transfigures, lightens and comforts everything that is alive, only at the price that its contents are infallibly evaporated, a strange form of *vitality without life*.

4.

Let us imagine now that the two snapshots of Malou and Dominique (embrace and loss) do not represent just a beginning and an end but a desire and a fact (desire for an indissoluble and definitive union – the fact of an irremediable loss); and that the dose of reality patiently imposed by Jan aims to emancipate the lovers from the nostalgia that paralyses them; that *after having been lost, they met in the strangest place to resynchronise their story, and they did not want to assume the irremediable of what discontinued it*. The aforementioned picture in which, while the lights go down, the trio formed by Dominique, Jan and Nazareth stages a kind of wake for Malou endorses this funereal reading with disturbing precision: a “group photo with a corpse” that Dominique avoids like someone who, once again, does not accept the end dictated by the image.

Café Müller is replete with these “false endings” that sometimes are real vacancies, “high apnoeas” of the device. The moment, in the middle of the *Stück*, in which Pina turns for a minute around the revolving door in the background, dragged by the inertial speed of the apparatus, is a “chronic navel” of this kind; it is as if she set in motion again the engine of the performance, re-propelling, through the door, as if it were a crank, the circulations, the “returns” that make up her world.

The characters, enchained to their redundant images, prisoners of an inner chronicity that does not match the exterior, cross through *Café Müller* as in a Lacanian “crossing of the fantasy”: the mental trial by ordeal of consciousness touching with its hand the object of their obsessions, the “radical scene” that harasses it, impeding any negotiation with reality (Žižek, 2011): the gesture of someone going through a cinema screen only to discover that there is only a wall behind.

The resistances or reticence of *Café Müller* make up in this respect a “shock therapy”: the dual essential trauma of colliding with the materiality of the world, and of going through the immateriality of desires. Jan stages an almost “crossing of the fantasy” when he lifts Malou from the floor, holds her and walks above the prostrate Dominique; stepping on the lover's body

barely brushing him means “surpassing” it, *realising its unreality*. Dance has never so strongly illustrated the plasticity of memory and the oscillations of the mental time as when Jan, after ending his crossing, *rewinds* the action, helping the woman to undo it.

Submitting *Café Müller* to so many analytical categories (dream, fixation, fantasy, crossing) enhances that closeness between the world of Bausch and the Netherworld of western tradition that many have glimpsed, reading the *Stück* as a strange version of the Afterlife.

In the Middle Ages, Dante elevated the Netherworld to an ontological phantasmagorical enclave in which the souls experienced circular time, bound to repeat the gestures, actions, situations that had determined the supraterritorial destiny of each one (Auerbach, 1963: 174-220; Fratini, 2014: 100-108); the unthinkable crossing between the generality of divine order and the particularity of human order, perpetuity and instantaneity, in which each subject ascended to *figure*, precisely due to this selective return *from* and *towards* an unmodifiable gesture-image.

Redundancy, multiplication, condensation, displacement, transformation and “torment” are the range of procedures in which the Freudian *Traumarbeit*, the poetic notion of composition and otherworldly representation, share a single paradigm of *figuralità*. The Benjaminian metaphor of the *chiffonnier* (of someone who reassembles the waste of history to give life to new metaphorical illuminations) — the archetype of all the future dramaturgy of dance — is not far from James Hillman’s conception of the oneiric experience as a “journey to the world below”: *katabasis* in which the soul moves between its nocturnal figures, made of waste of diurnal thought and *choreographed by death*, a formidable scrap yard of mental life (Benjamin, 1991 *PW* 441; Hillman, 1988: 29-68). Bausch’s poetic endeavour participates in such a grimoire of psychical, moral and formal procedures. All the readings based on this paradigm (*Café Müller* as a metalinguistic device; as a socio-psychological apologue; as an oneiric parable; as the Afterlife) can be advocated.

The world of *Café Müller*, bespangled with a thousand tasks of realisation and de-realisation, has indeed something “purgatorial”: a *salle des pas perdus* where people go to yearn, exacerbate and finally emend, to leave behind the eagerness of the world; to go through the fantasy of living and separate forever the timeless figure of life from its temporal meaning; or to revert once and for all its subjective *duration* in the objective cycles of a finally unitary and pacified *time*.

Café Müller refines, in this aspect, a spectacular syntax previously deployed in *Blaubart* (1977): the first part *sets out* the reasons that come together assertively in the semantic ecosystem of the piece. The calibre of these specific motifs is calculatedly very variable (individual gestures, images, objects, choreographic phrases, even entire “scenes”). The spectators will believe, first, that the *Stück* is just a disordered catalogue of semantemes. Next comes the task of centrifugation, distillation and recombination of the materials — the *Traumarbeit* of the piece. This phase encapsulates a succinct and un-homogenous vocabulary of terms and slogans, which is the bric-à-brac, the scrap whose tanned and recycled parts the piece will use to formulate its enigma,

its allegory: *the figures of its semantic dance*. There is always a moment of dynamic *chaos*, a *mad minute* of accelerated remix and *fluidification* of the same materials that the piece had previously set out in all their viscosity.

From now on, the pieces enter a final phase of “decompression”: the motifs become light, *interchangeable* and paratactic; they unlink themselves both from the meanings and the people: by ceasing to be “properties” they also cease to be signs of semantic signing. The last part of *Café Müller* provides several examples of this entropy in which any exchange, any *lapsus* of the system, seems possible.

The final interaction of Pina and Nazareth, which enables Nazareth to “normalise herself” and leave the stage while Pina carries the signs of both, is the most powerful metathesis of this final phase; the clearest evidence of the *homeostasis* achieved by the performance when the discreet units of *information* that grooved its semantic field are redeemed in the flat space of a definitive mimicry: of a structural in-difference, gestation of a final cross-breeding, capable of containing and surpassing them all. The anachronisms of the piece find their only chance of terminal synchrony in this “hanging” coherence, this methodically woven web of relations.

Bausch's pieces gradually take back the logical asymmetries of the materials to a *symmetrical logic*, in which everything is finally capable of vertiginously relating to everything; and in which everything achieves the homoestatic form of dream (Matte Blanco, 2000). The piece, literally, *falls asleep to continue dreaming unhurriedly with the flotation of all its signs*. It is not surprising that this final metamorphosis, in *Café Müller*, is performed ecstatically, upon the aria of the Night from Purcell's *Fairy Queen*, whose lyrics allude to concepts such as mystery, peace, secrecy, rest, dream: the only place in which *insistence ceases to find — and signify — resistance*; and where all difference between signs of dance and signs of life is reabsorbed into an almost enchanted absence of ulterior frictions.

The direct form of this terminal circulation will be the repetition *ad infinitum* of Malou's eternally reversible “crossing of fantasy” close to the revolving door, the allegory of an already liquid time without history; or of Bausch's cafeteria as a place that always leads back to oneself, bound to the circulation of everything that falls in its field of semantic gravitation: *space of time that bites its tail* whose necessary dynamic correlative will be, as in this case, a *definitive* action (“deprived of purpose” rather than infinite), a rounding off of Dominique, Jan and Malou in the clarity of a threshold and Pina's prowling in the blackness of a venue.

5.

Pina and Nazareth's roles in this nocturne remain to be more thoroughly read. It is not strange that, despite the pertinence in it of concepts such as *resistance* and *effort*, no one thought of applying even metaphorically to *Café Müller* these analytical criteria that Laban brought together under the name “theory of effort” and that formed part of the educational background that Jooss overturned in the renewed direction of the Folkwang Hochschule.

This taxonomy coined the suggestive category of Shadow Move. All those efforts that *preterintentionally* complicate the performance of any intentional move would be “shadow moves” (or move shadows”: remnants of muscular activity (mainly contractive or convulsive) that are to voluntary action what the subconscious is to logical thought, coupled as secret companions in the performance of all the gestures that individual consciousness dictates, explains or justifies (Laban, 1960: 85; North, 2011: 257-265).

As a carnal repository of a “story” (experiences, traumas, memories), the body is the opaque mass that no voluntary impulse of movement will be able to irradiate without casting, in unexpected somatic places, the shadow, the echo of itself: a dynamic *vanitas*, contrary to any principle of *economy* of effort. The body of the *frei Tanzer* — diaphanous or “glorious” if analysed according to theological models (Agamben, 2009) — will hence be freed of all the shadows that “dirty” the kinetic performance of the day-to-day: the muscular memories accumulated in the “treatment with reality”; the excesses or shortcomings of energies inherent to momentary emotional alterations; the tics and everything that betrays a rooted individual tendency consisting of adding to any primary impulse of objectification a secondary impulse of subjective origin.

If the notion of “dynamic economy” that underpins Labanian theatre is related, as I believe, to the vast socio-normalising project of the physical and gymnastic disciplines characteristic of *Körperkultur*, all move-shadows will figuratively also include the social affectations and any move (structurally unproductive or thoroughly harmful) that, because it expresses the inanity of the desire that provokes it, is *useless*.

The final corollary of the theory is also the most paradoxical: dance, as it is unproductive and expresses an always defeated human aspiration, albeit *invincible*, an irresistible vitality resisted by death, is the most radical *shadow*. Paul Valéry defined it, in the end, as “l’art d’organiser des mouvements de dissipation” (Valéry, 2016: 23-25). The most human, the least “animal” of our gestures, is the epitome of an unfortunate anti-economy.

By taking this paradigm to unseen levels of coherence, treating as shadow and dissipation any gesture (dance and action) related to the failure of communication, contact, love, Bausch returns to the shadows their timeless role as phantoms and spectres: remnants of an experience, incoercible persistence of an *Erlebnis*. *Any shadow, in her theatre, becomes dance. Any dance becomes shadow.*

The soul of Tanztheater rests on this trade of shadows between the vanity of living and dancing. Bausch’s characters, each of them linked to an emotional *quête*, a vain search, finally constitute, physically and figuratively, different temperatures of *effort* and an articulated map of *shadows*. Malou and Dominique the most; Jan and Jean, probably, the least.

Nazareth, in contrast, does almost nothing but shadow-moves: her unsteady walking (accentuated by “vanities” such as wig and heels), her erratic gestures, her eagerness to fit in the time and place of the action, the failure of her strategy of seduction (behind Dominique, who is looking after Malou), her astonishing efforts to be useful in the moments of crisis such as Dominique’s

second solo: shaking, moving the wrong chairs, opening or supporting doors that nobody will go through. Her dimension is actually out of time.

The only “desire” that sprouts from this panoply of failures is in fact dance. Nazareth tries it twice: when seeing herself alone on stage, she improvises a small choreography (a somewhat clumsy reminiscence of a dance more seen than experienced) and suddenly stops, as if she wished to avoid being surprised in an embarrassing situation; and when by the end she dances again less timidly and for longer, despite the breaking out of other characters who do not notice her.

In no case does Nazareth dance in a strict sense. Sifted through uncertainty, her gestures are rather a way of “marking”: the mnemonic sketch, the *shadow* of a dance. Impure, unfulfilled and timid, Nazareth’s attempt is the most touching expression of the role of dance as “ornamental” yearning that ferments in the in-betweens of daily neurosis. However, this recalcitrant “desire for dance”, left to an almost paradoxical extreme of the scale of movement (shadow, dissipation and vanity) makes Nazareth and Pina the most conclusively binary system of *Café Müller*, the doubling in whose antinomy surprising phenomena of parallelism are forged: Pina’s dress recalls a nightgown — Nazareth is urban and diurnal; Pina never leaves the space —; Nazareth’s gestural tendency is to always “leave” or “escape”. Although both go unnoticed by the remaining characters, Pina does not seem at all interested in the others and their tribulations, while Nazareth is the most inconsolably “relational” figure of the action: she tries in vain to be recognised and connect with the others *as if they were real*. Her flamboyant look and gestures (dance included) seem to relate to the incomplete programme of being similar to something or someone: of *being specifically who she is not*.

Pina never gives the impression of taking on the matters with which she clashes. As for sleepwalkers, it is as if the physical place of her activity did not coincide with her mental place: an ungraspable scenario for someone who is looking at her walking, unaware of danger, through dangerous spots such as the proverbial cornice of a building. Hence the statutes of dance as seen by Tanztheater: reproducing gestures that would be mimetically comprehensible if their real context of origin was known and that seem abstract only because this context has eclipsed, or *is only being dreamt*.

The sleepwalker’s legendary imprudence is that of someone possessed by movement that, without being discontinuous or deliberate because of any state of wakefulness, is the object of her psychical experience. Thus, Pina’s impacts (in contrast to Malou or Dominique) are never traumatic: she “bounces” slightly against the walls, the tables and the chairs. The collisions will convey on to the figure an impalpable diagram of undulations, as if the subject suffering from them were slightly more “diffuse”, more invertebrate than a flesh and blood body.

The only reason why *Café Müller* dispenses with an animal that embodies the paradoxical symbiosis with a space and its discomforts, with a material and poetic ecosystem, is that this role of totem corresponds here to Pina herself: animal, *genius loci*, impalpable presence that irradiates the aporias of the whole environment and that does not show the impact of playing down,

resistance and reticence that the space inflicts on others: that does not construct or destroy “relations” with the remaining characters but becomes the broken mirror that rhapsodically captures and duplicates the actions of all of them: a clear dynamic in Malou’s first solo, which Pina reproduces in fragments, offering dynamic echoes rather than “exact copies”. The moves that in Malou make up a dense pattern of resistances (interior and exterior) return to Pina a few seconds later, relieved of all its industrious elements, from all their material parameters.

Malou irresistibly “throws” into a gesture any dance movement — Pina manages to transfigure, distil, purify in dance even the most arduous gestures. If Pina embodies an allegory of death, it is because she incorporates the memorial of the shapes that are subsumed from the contents of life. If she embodies an allegory of dance, it is because *dance is the dreamt form of life, its integral form*: an inaccurate reflection and a solace of existence; impalpable *figure of life*, which has abdicated the density, weight and relativity of the univocal and intentional meanings to infinitely signify, make each one’s incomplete dance eternal.

Pina’s only solo emblematically coincides with “When I Am Laid in Earth”, the final aria of *Dido and Aeneas*. The most repeated phrase of Dido’s melody to Belinda — “Remember me, but forget my Fate” — tells with distress her desire to be, in memory, an imperishable image rather than a story of errors; a silent shadow rather than an unhappy flesh.

However, if her invincible yearning *to be destined* to dance is piercing in human gestures, Bausch’s poetics preaches the opposite principle no less strongly: the metamorphosis of any dance into *gestum*, the participle of a Latin verb (*gerere*) that means carry, hold, *take, gestate*. Embodied with the greatest purity possible by Pina, dance returns to the most human of its endeavours: to collect, raise, suspend the inanity of those actions that, as long as we live, are “means” to an always neglected end; to set out as a secret good the vanity of our gestures, of our poor human instruments; and to finally exhibit “*a mediaty; the process of making a means visible as such*” (Agamben, 1996: 52). Devoted to this delicate task of keeping the gestures of life in suspense between yearning and fulfilment, between hope and memory, of “saving” from nothingness and gestating *senza tempo* the gestures that life discards, dance would no longer be an aesthetic enclave of ends without means to become the final metaphysical enclave of the *means without end*.

Nazareth and Pina are the living image of two instances that any Tanztheater will seek to address as peer aspirations: *to aspire from life to the other life that is already in dance, and to dream from life about any life that is already gestated in life*.

In the end of *Café Müller* the two instances merge when Nazareth dresses Pina with the signs (wig and coat) that had turned her until now into a figure of existence and its inadequacies. The red-haired dancer that is *totally shadow* finally coincides with the sleepwalker woman that is *shadow of everything*: all the chaotic symptoms of existence rest on the single symptom that can absorb, contain and transfigure all of them. Life and dance thus overlap, in a night common to both, made of echoes and reflections. Perhaps

this is eternity (because the space eclipses and only time remains), perhaps this figure who walks through the darkness of the end is really a figure of death. If such is the case, *Café Müller* will have gestated the task of all poetics almost religiously. And Tanztheater will have managed to be the structural anachronism of western dance as it has stated a secret and easy truth, that *dance is the experienced form of the Beyond of everything that lives*.



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