

DANCE/CURATING BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

FOREWORD

Tanzplan Deutschland is one of the biggest projects of the Federal Cultural Foundation. A total of 12.5 million euros has been invested in the five-year initiative and its nine city projects and various educational programmes are fertile breeding grounds for the future of dance in Germany. The Tanzplan office in Berlin monitors developments on the ground, establishes ties, initiates new steps and takes up the issues arising from dance work at the grassroots level.

The launch of four new study courses for dance in Berlin and Frankfurt, and the initiation of our own projects in the dance, choreography and dance pedagogy training courses, raised questions about the other fields of work in dance for which training is being provided. It became clear at this time that although new fields of work have emerged, such as dance curating, this job does not feature either in dance courses or in other professional further education offers. This is in direct contrast with the visual arts, for which relevant study courses have existed around the world for a long time now. On the other hand, there is a surge of many young artists, dramaturges, dance theorists and cultural managers on the market. Where can they learn and try things out? And how do experienced curators get fresh ideas and impetus? As in other areas, we invited experts (artists, curators, event organisers, producers and academics from various fields of dance, theatre and the visual arts) to take part in a joint brainstorming session to find answers to these questions. The first meeting took place in the artist Asta Gröting's studio at the Uferstudio in Berlin in October 2008, the second at the Academy for Visual Arts in Leipzig in May 2009, followed by a public presentation and discussion at the Dance Congress held in Hamburg in November 2009.

The curator Christine Peters devised the content of these meetings of experts and moderated them. She also summarised the issues and action proposals for this document. We would like to say a big thank you to all the experts who took part (and you can contact them should you have any questions, see page 11), also to PACT Zollverein as the host of the preparatory workshops for the Dance Congress, and to Prof. Dr. Beatrice von Bismarck for her contribution entitled Curatorial Acting.

Madeline Ritter and Ingo Diehl

(Managing director) (Coordinator Educational Programme) – Tanzplan Deutschland

CHRISTINE PETERS

DANCE/CURATING BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

“Reacting. Being on the road. Highly mobile, changed working and living environments in transit zones. The computer in the bag at all times. Global relationships. The mobile phone vibrates somewhere on the body. Fully informed. What about? Careers? Never as before. No main theme, a zigzag instead. Precarious life? We are not really doing too well. Communities? Yes, but earn money nonetheless. Blurred line between living and working. Quicksand all over the place, on the move on building sites.

*Acting. Quickly and originally. Concentrate. Keep a low profile, be cool. But then again not too cool, still go for it with heart and soul. Play well, sell concepts, have good ideas, keep making points. Be able to perform, be intelligent when present, develop clout. Be creative, ‘Creative Cities’: immaterial labour that structures our everyday life, the course of our day. Do nothing alone. Approach the competition. Never want to be the best. Learning, innovation, always stay a few years ahead. With others? Yes, but how? Co-operate without committing yourself for too long. Find one’s place in alliances and networks. Always both. What does one do? {Gesa Ziemer, in *Komplizenschaft. Eine Taktik und Ästhetik der Kritik? / (Complicity. A Tactic and Aesthetic of Criticism?)*, Zhdk, Zurich, 2007}*

Tanzplan Deutschland’s Dance/Curating between Theory and Practice initiative aims to promote the

exchange of experience and positions in the field of curating from various professional perspectives and to explore the specific issues relating to the curating of dance.

Two workshops have already taken place, in Berlin in October 2008 and in Leipzig in May 2009. These involved selected curators, artists and university professors from the performing and visual arts. Participants first discussed terminology, working methods, the deficits in initial and further training, and the professionalisation of curators in order to map out the potential scope for action in the future on the basis of this initial appraisal.

If we think of curating as one of many ways of being culturally productive, then moving beyond the profiling of individuals and content this raises the issue of an expansion and renewal of resources. The definition of curating covers many different forms of acting and reflecting that individual curators may develop as skills in the course of a lifetime but which they can rarely embody at first go and on a permanent basis in their person. It is this complexity of expectations, skills and requirements that symptomatically reaches a frontier in practice: The high and accelerated output of cultural and trans-cultural production is in many cases the reason why curators produce their deficits themselves.

“Curatorial skill is not so distant from artistic skill as it also has to invent its own criteria.” (Heiner Goebbels)

Whether we are talking about the development and budgeting of concepts, production and exhibition dramaturgy, the timing of various artistic production methods and aesthetic approaches – either direct dialogue with artists, technicians, managers, dramaturges or communication with the public – all these elements in the implementation of projects are heavily dependent on the skills of the individual curator, planning and weighting, as well as the ability to multi-task.

Curators also make assertions with every choice they make and sort, enable or exclude. Every step in the decision-making process therefore has to be scrutinised and checked thoroughly. But how can the necessary information be ascertained and the workload controlled in the face of ever increasing global complexity? How can a discourse that dovetails theory with practice be developed on a permanent basis? Where is the free space for artistic work and flexible dramaturgy beyond practical and profiling constraints? Which artistic, organisational and social skills and communication strategies are needed to curate dance? How does the specific job definition for a dance curator relate to the inter-disciplinary field?

With regard to contemporary artistic practice that is applied internationally and part of a global network, the urgent issue arises – which necessarily has to go further than organisational and management issues and help tackle deficits in communication, publication, archiving and theory – of a “higher professionalisation” for new and “advanced” curators, particularly in the field of dance.

Spaces, sabbaticals, excursions and travel grants, fellowships and residency programmes for curators for research purposes. In light of an expanding arts world and complex job descriptions, these measures and structures for appropriate and vocational further training are missing across the board here.

Both the workshops in Berlin and Leipzig were a first step in the re-evaluation of the development of curatorial practice beyond the study courses that have already been implemented in the many “curatorial studies” programmes of visual arts courses at universities and colleges.

But launching new courses is not the most urgent concern at the moment, rather the bringing together of different ways of thinking and working in the professional field so as to use existing institutions and resources for things that were not possible before and to open up new possibilities, contexts and networks that otherwise remain inaccessible.

A first, concrete approach for a long-term co-operation and dovetailing has already been formulated Berlin and later developed further in Leipzig in this regard. It is open to other partners and can be debated and repeated elsewhere. Professors Beatrice von Bismarck and Gabriele Brandstetter are currently working together to develop specific formats for the practice orientated Cultures of the Curatorial study programme at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig and for the dance studies programme at the Free University in Berlin. It will be open to external curators who want to study and acquire

particular theoretical and practical themes. This additional qualification on the one hand covers the compiling of the theoretical resources necessary to analyse and develop festivals, exhibitions and other forms of conveying culture. It also includes another essential aspect in the setting of theoretical goals, i.e. deceleration.

Places of deceleration

There is a lack of places in which curators embarking on further training can compare working methods and explore the respective visual regimes even without the pressure to produce. Choreographic centres, theatres, museums and art associations curious about an inter-disciplinary working culture could in this respect act as the catalysts for available resources and knowledge bases. To the extent that today's artists create the conditions for production and form structures, it is therefore also necessary, in terms of the responsibility, creative will and communicative flair of curators, to negotiate new guidelines with cultural businesses that argue the economic case.

Christine Peters, freelance curator in Frankfurt

BEATRICE VON BISMARCK CURATORIAL ACTING

Curatorial practice has become one of the most popular areas of cultural activity in recent years and is more fiercely contested as a result. The increased international mobility of people and objects, the increased significance of culture in the economic development of a region, as well as the increased social demand for creative potential are the reasons for its status and the requirement for more sophisticated skills. An independent form of producing and conveying cultural meaning has emerged, mainly in the visual arts but increasingly also in neighbouring disciplines, such as dance, theatre, film, literature, music and not least the natural sciences. The assembling and linking of objects, information, people and spaces are proving to be not only constitutive tasks for the conception, setting up and publicising of exhibitions, but also key skills in a social, political and economic environment that is influenced by globalisation and post-Fordism.

Post-modern expansions of the concept of art and post-Fordist conceptions of work overlap here, so the curatorial act of linking on the one hand has an apparent affinity with those activities the Italian sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato brought together under the term "immaterial labour". According to Lazzarato, immaterial labour has shifted the source of wealth in the new economy to conceptual activities. Knowledge and skills in handling information and culture have taken the place of manufacturing processes. Activities in the "secondary services sector", such as management, organisation, consultancy, publication and vocational training, have increased disproportionately with the change from an industrial to a service economy. The differences between conception and execution, effort and creativity, author and public in these working processes are beginning to dissolve alongside this change. As an organisation, a social network, a link-up of content, an incentive, an enabler and an interpretive layout of integrative practice, curatorial practice therefore links together social technologies and technologies of the self in a way that satisfies the current demands of economic management.

On the other hand, the history and status of curatorial practice are closely interwoven with a critical, self-reflective orientation in artistic practice. In particular it continues two strands of development in the field of art after 1960 that caused the analytical debate and social negotiating processes to fold into each other as a result of mutual encroachments by artists and intermediaries, Conceptual art and institutional criticism, which repositioned the focus of object-based art on art based on an ideal with relational and discursive composition, constitute one strand. One of the consequences of this approach was to make the activities, configurations, locations and contexts involved in the production of meaning a part of artistic practice. The adoption of curatorial activities – selecting, assembling, classifying, arranging, presenting and communicating – took place at the same time. The key

decisions for the emergence of art and its diverse forms, the positions from which these decisions are taken, the criteria on which these decisions are based, as well as the matters addressed by them can be configured to the concept and flow into the context-related process via the various participants.

In parallel with this, a new occupational category emerged in the course of the significantly increasing activities in the field of art and their diversification in the 1960s, namely independent curators. The Swiss curator Harald Szeeman possessed the prototype quality for this. He forged a place for himself in the arts world in which exhibitions were made up of artistic exhibits, but in the synopsis they became the “works” of their curator. The potential for conflict thereby created among participants who clash within the same scope of duties is ignited by the requirement to produce meaning. Against the organisers of thematic large exhibitions or exhibition organisers portraying themselves as *über-artists*, the artists demanded that they be allowed to determine the appearance and the contextualisation of their works themselves.

These touches and overlaps of different fields of activities and social contexts are responsible for both the cultural and political dimension in which curating notably became a negotiating table for conditions in the cultural and economic field. Initially attributed to a clearly defined occupational category – that of curators – they are today mainly artists who themselves make use of the curatorial-related tasks, rolls and privileges, closely followed however by critics, gallerists, theatre and dance dramaturges or academics of diverse disciplines. Curatorial activity appears to be a cultural practice that has settled between the academic and artistic practices. It is related to both fields and is influenced by those involved in both fields. The fact that it brings about a shifting of positions, mutual exchange and negotiation processes, as well as changes in the traditional pattern of roles, creates the potential for conflict, but at the same time also marks out the particular potential curatorial activity has to check, change and redirect the existing aesthetic, social and economic circumstances and conditions in the differing fields of cultural practice.

Prof. Beatrice von Bismarck, *professor of Art History and Visual Studies at the University for Visual Arts in Leipzig*

Participants A-Z

Heike Albrecht (Artistic director, Sophiensaele Berlin) <http://www.sophiensaele.com>

Prof. Dr. Beatrice von Bismarck (Professor of Art History and Visual Studies, University for Visual Arts in Leipzig) <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de>

Edith Boxberger (Journalist, Hamburg)

Prof. Dr. Gabriele Brandstetter (Professor for Theatre- and Dance Studies, Free University Berlin) <http://www.fu-berlin.de/theaterwissenschaft>

Dr. Franz Anton Cramer (Journalist, professor, Co-operative Dance Education Centre – Pilot Project Tanzplan Berlin) <http://www.tanzplan-deutschland.de>

deufert + plischke, (Dr. Katrin Deufert + Thomas Plischke, choreographers and video-artists, Hamburg) <http://www.artistwin.de>

Ingo Diehl (Coordinator Educational Programme, Tanzplan Deutschland, Berlin) <http://www.tanzplan-deutschland.de>

Iris Dressler (Co-Director, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart) <http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de>

Dr. Susanne Foellmer (Research assistant, Institute for Theatre Studies, Free University Berlin)
<http://www.fu-berlin.de/theaterwissenschaft>

Sigrid Gareis (Foundation director of Tanzquartier Wien)

Prof. Heiner Goebbels (Composer and stage director, Frankfurt am Main, professor und director of the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen) <http://www.heinergoebbels.com>
<http://www.uni-giessen.de/theater/de>

Prof. Asta Gröting (Artist, Berlin, professor for sculpture, University for Visual Arts Braunschweig)
<http://www.astagroeting.de>

Stefan Hilterhaus (Artistic director PACT Zollverein Essen) <http://www.pact-zollverein.de>

Dr. Pirkko Husemann (Curator for Dance, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin) <http://www.hebbel-am-ufer.de>

Hubert Machnik (Musician and composer, Frankfurt/M.) <http://www.hmach.com>

Florian Malzacher (Chief dramaturg and curator, Festival Steirischer Herbst Graz)
<http://www.steirischerherbst.at>

Dr. Nina Möntmann (free lance curator, author, professor und head of Art Theory and the History of Ideas, Royal University College of Fine Arts, Stockholm) <http://www.kkh.se>

Christine Peters (Free lance curator, Frankfurt/M.)

Prof. Dr. Patrick Primavesi (Professor at the Institute for Theatre Science, University Leipzig)
<http://www.zv.uni-leipzig.de>

Dorothee Richter (Director MAS Curating, Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste) <http://www.institutculturalstudies.ch>

Madeline Ritter (Managing director, Tanzplan Deutschland, Berlin) <http://www.tanzplan-deutschland.de>

Dr. Jörn Schaffaff (Research assistant, Course of Studies "Culture of Curating", University for Visual Arts in Leipzig) <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de>

Imprint

Tanzplan Deutschland e.V., Paul-Lincke-Ufer 42/43, 10999 Berlin, Phone 49 (0)30.695797-10, Fax: 49 (0)30.695797-19, E-Mail: [info\(a\)tanzplan-deutschland.de](mailto:info(a)tanzplan-deutschland.de), www.tanzplan-deutschland.de

Editing: Christine Peters, Barbara Schindler, Translation: Nick Woods. Editing deadline: December 2009. Tanzplan Deutschland, is a initiative created by the German Federal Cultural Foundation