PhD research project: Material Political Bodies

The role of kinaesthesia and proprioception in the political of dance in 1960s in New York and 1990s in Western Europe.

The central question of my research project is how the material body contributes to the political significance of theatre dance. My study focuses on developments in theatre dance in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular the Judson Dance Theatre of 1960’s New York and the ‘conceptual’ dance of 1990’s Western Europe.

The first consideration is to define how theatre dance might be termed ‘political’. My investigations will focus first on how developments in these periods came to be described as political. In general, activities in society (particularly artistic activities) that do not belong overtly to the political domain are ascribed political influence due to their ideological contribution. In other words, by producing representations of identities which have political repercussions. The working hypothesis of the ‘political’ is that the political activity denotes a moment in social relations when the balance of power can shift, can be challenged, and thus, friction and disagreement arise. (See also Mouffe, 2005)

I will focus on the ways that dancing bodies contribute to these processes. This has theoretical repercussions for the consideration of how concrete bodily activities contribute to ideological representation, because it moves beyond a reduction of such activities to mere products or constructions of these ideological processes—the case with much theory in the latter half of the 20th century, notably in the important contributions of Bourdieu and Foucault. Here I propose to consider subjectivity so that the bodily aspect is integrated. In order to specify aspects of embodiment I will look at forms of bodily experience, or proprioception, and movement experience, or kinesthesia, both of which play a crucial role in dance but about which relatively little has been written in relation to the political. This interdisciplinary research moves between cultural and political theory, with special interest in dance, theatre, neurology and cognitive psychology. The project will consider the different theoretical modes encountered in the above-mentioned fields, and aims to contribute to thinking about their relationship(s) with each other.

Research trajectory
I have chosen to focus on two periods in recent dance history, the 1960s in New York and the 1990s in Western Europe. In both periods choreographers have dealt with the body explicitly as subject matter for making dance, particularly in the cases of the following choreographers: Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Meg Stuart, Boris Charmatz, and Xavier Le Roy. In the first stage of the research project I will look at ways in which dance theorists have defined these choreographers’ work as ‘political’. This will allow me to further the connection between the notions of the ‘political’ and the ‘bodily’ and will offer opportunities to pursue questions about subjectivity and bodily events. For example: how are human activities described? Where are notions such as agency and subjectivity located? How are these related with embodied activity? With concepts derived from the above investigations, I will explore anatomical, physiological and neurological ideas that the choreographers work with, in particular proprioception and kinaesthesia. Finally I will present a detailed analysis of selected choreographies, considered in relation to the concepts developed around the concepts of the political and the bodily.
LITERATURE


Lepecki, Andre. In: Brandstetter, Gabriele; Völckers, Hortensia (Hg.) (2000). *ReMembering the Body, Körperbilder in Bewegung*. Ostfildern-Ruit


