Choreography As a Cenotaph: The Memory of Movement

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> One has to dig up the dead, over and over again [...] the future only arises out of a dialogue with the dead. – *Heiner Müller*

> Movement is a factory of the fact that you are actually evaporating. – *William Forsythe*

Rainer Maria Rilke published his collection of poems *Sonnets to Orpheus* in 1923 with a dedication of a special kind. He constructed the text as a cenotaph, "written as a monument for Vera Ouckama Knoop"[1]. The memorial commemorates a young dancer who died of a mysterious disease in 1919 at the age of nineteen. She stopped dancing, her body changed, and she sought movement in other forms – in music and in drawing. It was "as though the dance denied her were still finding its expression, ever more quietly and discreetly", wrote Rilke to Margot Sizzo on 12 April 1923. But this cenotaph which the texts represent is not only meant for the deceased dancer. Much more, the sonnets – in the name of the mythical singer capable of moving even the dead with his song – refer as an epitaph to the death of dance itself. They put writing, as memory and as a lament on evanescence, in place of the moving body. The poetry invokes that empty space which has divested itself of dance – a vacuity which, for this very reason, is called "the unheard-of centre":

> You still knew the place where the lyre
> lifted sounding – : the unheard-of centre.[2]

Under the sign of the mythical invoker of the dead, Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* demonstrate what choreography intends: the description of that space which has

always been in the process of expelling the body's movement. Seen in this way, choreography is a form of writing along the boundary between presence and no longer being there: an inscription of the memory of that moving body whose presence cannot otherwise be maintained. Choreography is an attempt to retain as a graph that which cannot be held: movement. On the one hand, 'choreography' means the writing of movement as notation; on the other hand, it also refers to the text of a composition of movement. Choreography, as the writing *of* and *about* movement, as preserved memory, thus always includes something of a requiem. It is precisely this memory which designates the Orphic: as a space between life and death. This space between the material and the immaterial world opens and closes by means of the gesture of turning, by the torsion of the body which "holds open the door to the grave"[3]. The fact that working with movement – the placing of steps and their transition in placement – also includes entering these interspaces and that choreography places and erases traces of memory has deeply engraved itself on the modern consciousness. Rilke's poetic phenomenology of these processes gives an idea of this.

The works of contemporary choreographers such as Meg Stuart, Xavier Le Roy, and William Forsythe are also particularly imbued with a reflection on the fleeting quality of dance and of the fragmented traces of memory which, at the very most, allow themselves to be gathered up as vestiges and translated into another text.

William Forsythe – vestiges of whose dance pieces I shall present, from my own memory, over and over in what follows as a leading thread in my argument – has been engaged by these questions more, perhaps, than any other contemporary choreographer. In *Limb's Theorem* (1990), a fragmented interspace is opened up as a theatre of the memory of movement. The dancers move on a stage kept so dark that the audience can only partially perceive the bodies. The contours and three-dimensionality of the forms are further blurred by the precise handling of the lights. The lighting conditions influence perception in such a way that the imagination adds the invisible, whose absence we feel in the forms and movement. In these borderline areas of the perceptible, seeing becomes insecure; the corporeality of the forms is porous and the line of the figures of movement is interrupted. Light and shadow cause anamorphic distortions.

As the title suggests, the choreography postulates a theorem on limbs. Not a complete theory, but rather something like a hypothesis on the body and its parts. The human figure cannot be grasped as a whole. Instead, it constantly eludes its stable form – in movement and through movement. The body thus appears divided into parts, or dis-membered, to then become reassembled, or re-membered in the

viewer's reconstructive perception. The entire text of the piece constantly formulates and then refutes other versions of this theorem on the organisation and disorganisation of the limbs. The programme booklet is part of this choreographic theorem as well. It contains text fragments by Aldo Rossi and Ludwig Wittgenstein: philosophical reflections on the subject of perception and imagination, and on the idea of the fragment. Printed on rough, recycled paper, the typefaces are set in justified blocks of text printed as a negative image – white on black (the play of light and shadow on the stage translated onto paper), paler on every successive page, and with headings skewed in such a way that the layers of print gradually overlap. There is hardly any differentiation between (back)ground and (typographic) figure, and the body of writing slips into an indistinctness which is analogous to the figures of the dancers themselves. The blocks of text which embody the memory of writing – a memorial to the perception of movement – themselves move within a (scriptorial) space in which they fade and are superimposed to the point of illegibility, whereby a process of overwriting is set in motion: It is a kind of choreography on paper as a palimpsest. The justified blocks of text in the programme booklet are interspersed with empty pages – that is, with paper surfaces that are not inscribed, but rather incised (the verb 'to write', like the Greek word *graph*, originally meant 'to cover with writing' as well as 'to scratch' or 'to incise'). Geometric figures, lines, circles, acute angles, and curves are punched into the paper like the floor plan of choreographic notation. They jump up as the page is turned, suddenly taking on a spatial form.

The programme booklet keeps posing a set of basic questions in choreography, the same questions as those addressed on the stage: the continuity of movement and the identity of bodily form. Choreography – as a sketching of paths, as cartography – is "folded" into these pages. In this way, the programme booklet brings to view a virtual mise en scène of the shifting of letters: the emancipation of writing from the principle *scripta manent* into the fleetingness of movement in space. "Fragment," reads the text fragment by the architect Aldo Rossi, "*frammento* means a small chip which has broken out of a larger body", and he goes on to ask whether an accumulation of fragments, rather than being termed a mere "rubbish heap", should not actually be called the "city of the future".

What William Forsythe's choreography takes up on and makes tangible in different forms and frameworks – on paper and on stage – are highly abstract questions concerning the space and time of movement and the never more than fragmentary traces which survive as its memory. And this investigation itself, like the framework provided by the title, takes place in an interspace: in a form of the concept of Orphic, stemming from Rilke's mythical poetics and translated into late 20th-century

thinking. As well as meaning 'extremity', the word 'limb' (deriving from the Latin *limbus* = 'hem' or 'edge') also designates the form of the circle and arc in instruments used for measuring and drafting angles. Thus *Limb's Theorem* – the choreography in the book and the performance on the stage – could be read as experiments with instruments of figural measurement and engraving: with the precision technology of figure placement and spatial delineation. At the same time, the fragility and unpredictability of this kind of work become apparent.

'Limbus', with its completely different meaning of 'hem' and 'border zone', is closely related to 'limbo', which refers to the realm between heaven and hell – that sphere in which, according to the Christian faith, deceased unbaptised children linger: Dante's *purgatorio*. 'Limbo' – the region that Christ descended into – means a heterotopia comparable to the passage between Hades and Earth that Orpheus passed through in his search for the dead Eurydice. Finally, another level of meaning enters the programme of *Limb's Theorem*, one that also illuminates the complex context of (in-between) space, movement, and memory from another angle: from the perspective of neurophysiology. The technical term 'limbic system' denotes the zone in the brain which – as the superordinate integrative system – is responsible for the organisation of human behaviour. Perception and memory of movement in reading and writing – this is all we are doing – always produce this interspace after the fact: a limbo of moving bodies and an epitaph of choreography.

Cartography – Notation and Memory of Movement

Perhaps at the very beginning of all memory, as a mythical memorial to movement, there was the labyrinth: Ariadne's dance floor. The Palace of Knossos was created by Daedalus as a labyrinth, in the centre of which the Minotaur was enclosed. And Ariadne received the thread which helped her find the way out of the labyrinth. The floor plan of the labyrinth was the spatial figure of a loss of orientation in movement and, at the same time, the location of a sacrificial ritual. The repetition of these paths – in a dance which redirects disorientation back into an order which can be defined cartographically – also invokes the dead. It is spatial notation which transforms the threat of death into a symbolic act through the memory of the sacrificial victim (those human sacrifices brought to the Minotaur), for the victim's body disappears in the centre of the labyrinth. In dance, this *corpus* of the victim is absent. Memory alone retains the spatial pattern, the design of the choreography.

All memory is spatial. Choreography, as notation and as a cartography of movement, is a means of retaining the memory of movement – alongside other, more recent recording systems such as photographic images, film, video, and electronic

media. But how does the memory of movement translate into writing? And how can the traces of kinetic memory be pursued in a process that never runs in a linear and progressive manner, but rather develops an anticipatory power in its oscillation between remembering backwards and forwards? But conversely, perception would also be impossible – as the results of neurological research studies tell us – if the brain did not already keep memories readily available at all times.[4] "I'm always touching the latest action with the new thing I'm doing," remarked the dancer and choreographer Saburo Teshigawara, "but the stream is not a line that you draw behind you as in skiing. That's in the past, whereas our stream in dance is always already in the future."[5] In this process of remembering movement "in the future", images are always being erased and replaced with others. In his phenomenology of memory, Henri Bergson emphasised the way in which the perception of movement and the dissection of the remembered images of movement work together: "You substitute the path for the journey, and because the journey is subtended by the path you think that the two coincide. But how should a *progress* coincide with a *thing*, a movement with an immobility?"[6] According to Bergson, images of memory and imaginative contents interlock, exchange places in such a way that memory no longer imagines our past alone: "In truth, it no longer *represents* our past to us, it *acts* it [...]"[7] Memory becomes agent, player, and director. Memory choreographs the recognition of movement.

A look back in history reveals that this intricate connection between the memory of movement and the *imagines* of imaginative power already was of primary importance in the choreography of the Renaissance. One of the earliest dance treatises of the period, written by Domenico da Piacenza, emphasises that *memoria* and *fantasma* are inseparably linked in the choreographic process. And Domenico finds an appropriate image for this:

> Note that fantasmata is a physical quickness which is controlled by understanding the misura first mentioned above. This necessitates that at each tempo one appears to have seen Medusa's head, as the poet says, and be of stone in one instant, then, in another instant, take to flight like a falcon driven by hunger.[8]

The moment that the image of movement is fixed in the memory is expressed through metaphors of stiffening and falling: as petrification through Medusa's gaze and as the sweeping dive of a hungry falcon. In these images, fissures of movement are cut into the memory process – transitional zones, intervals between individual sequences of movement. The *fantasmata* denote moments of rest, like taking a breath. They

open that meaningful instant in which the (remembered) image arrives at the moment of quiet and of the keeping still of the body, encompassing the movement altogether in the figure. In this pictorial evocation between the past and the future, the *fantasmata* offer a reflection of the *memoria*. The movement is completed in stillness, the procedural memory is overlaid by the anticipatory memory. Because for choreography, the art of memorising means far more than committing the patterns of movement and paths to memory. Much more, it is the visualisation of the entire process in each respective moment of movement: as though one were imagining an image, a choreographic map.

Thus, along with the theory of memory in dance, the search for a system of notation for movement also began. Shortly thereafter, writing became the cultural archive of dance; notations of choreography were developed and formulated in treatises by dance masters at Italian courts. What remains are peculiar scores: spatial and temporal notations which codify and record movement by means of figures showing floor paths and ciphers symbolising the directions for carrying out these movements. The mnemonic system of dance consisted of figures, names, and numbers. Writing thus reconstructed that which has always disappeared when the body moves – as a system, as an ordering of the uncontrollable. It is true that the body is absent in these texts, but it has no place in the memory script of these notations; bodily movements, the posture of the head, or the turning of the torso were not transferred into signs – this remained for later systems of notation.

Not until the end of the 19th century did the body begin to be accounted for significantly in the process of memory and theories of memory. The "phantasms" which permeate the memory of the body, together with the remembered and excluded images, henceforth appear subordinate to another dynamics of movement, that of the dynamics of the subconscious. They no longer mark the turning point of stillness and the transformation through remembered and anticipated memory, but rather appear as foreground images concealing the repressed, dislocated, and unreachable memories within the crypt of the subconscious.

> One has to let the phantasms play close up to the bodies: against the bodies, because they adhere to them and project onto them, but also because they touch them, cut through them, regionalise them, and multiply their surfaces; and, in like manner, outside the bodies, between which they play their game according to laws of transference, turning and moving unknown to them. The phantasms do not carry the organisms on into the imaginary; they topologise the materiality of the body.[9]

Starting with Freud, this topologisation of the body and the occupation of the map of the body by phantasms which follow dynamics of remembering and forgetting inaccessible to the consciousness became a new subject in 20th-century cultural science. Memory became a problem case.

William Forsythe demonstrated that this "problem case" could also be handled playfully. His choreography *Artifact* (1986 version) contains a dictionary of those concepts that form a kind of matrix of the composition: a thesaurus of those elements of speech taken out of the archive and made current as dance. One of these concepts is the word 'remember'. A text woven out of this concept is worked into the choreography in a long sequence of paradoxical twists on remembering and forgetting: "Remember the story" and "I forgot the story about you [...] remember, remember [...] remember"[10]. Remembering and not remembering, forgetting and that which cannot be remembered are continuously being invoked by means of voice and body: "They will never remember where. They always forgot which. They never remember how [...]". And in the course of this choreography, which portrays remembering as concrete poetry and which summons up the moving anagrams of body parts and spoken parts as a spatial puzzle, forgetting itself is, finally, programmed as well: Which viewer is able to remember the exact formulation of the words spoken, the phrases of movement? Writing about it, as is the case here, for example, always requires the archaeological collecting of traces, the fragmentary reconstruction using the few remaining written and pictorial documents.

The Computer: Saver of Memory and Archive of Movement?

At the end of the 20th century, the question arises anew as to how the memory of body movement can be saved. Which means of storage offer the possibility of repeating, of reproducing the sequences of movement, and what does this mean for cultural tradition? For a history of the moving body? Can video documentation replace writing? And what changes do programmes that electronically simulate body movement bring about? Or even the development of programmes by researchers of artificial intelligence, who, conversely, carry on the observation of human movement with computers, thereby contributing to the perception of movement?[11] A matrix for producing choreographies still intended for the stage – as with Merce Cunningham? Or will the computer become the comprehensive storage place for the vocabulary of movement and the precise medium for the recording of performances in the future? William Forsythe uses a specially designed computer programme which he developed in conjunction with the Institute for Visual Media of the Centre for Art and Media Technology Karlsruhe in this way. This CD-ROM, in extended form and with

commentary, is now available to the public as an archive of movement as well as a document of certain choreographies, such as *Self Meant to Govern* (1994). Elements of the dance alphabet which Forsythe has developed with his dancers are stored in this digital archive and can serve as an aid to the dancers' memories. The CD becomes a sort of cyberprompter. But at the same time, this choreographic archive also offers a freely available inventory of movement material which can be called up on the computer screen by dancers and non-dancers alike as a scheme configured by the program or permanently encoded. The aim is a school of *analytical* seeing, as the subtitle announces, *A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye.*[12] Besides the didactic function as an "interactive school of dance", there is the level of multimedia documentation, and finally, the level of media and corporeal transformation which Forsythe especially emphasises. The dancers' work takes place in training, and also, as in *Self Meant to Govern*, in the interaction on the stage: in the improvisations with those code elements which the computer supplies as random material. The choice and the activation of elements of movement from this basic storage catalogue does not occur in the form of a mimetic transferral, but rather in a translation which always transforms: not as an edition of the choreographic texts, but rather in the working out of variant material for improvisation. *Improvisation Technologies* is the title of this storage of movement on CD-ROM.

In this way, the stage work of choreography consists of up-dating computer-supported mnemotechnics for each performance. The dancers are agents of the pre-existing technologies of memory, and this should not at all be understood negatively, in the sense of pure "user" pragmatics, because Forsythe's dancers are also involved in the development of an alphabet of movement: as co-programmers of mnemonic devices. Moreover, it is interesting to note that Forsythe assumes that a kind of memory is inherent in the kinetic sphere itself: "your kinesphere functions as a memory [...]"[13] The concept of the kinesphere, which Forsythe has adopted from the expressive dancer and founder of kinetography, Rudolf von Laban, designates the field of movement that lies within reach of the body, a kind of invisible spatial mantle that Laban drew in the form of a crystal – the icosahedron. This transparent, crystal representation of the kinesphere is, so to speak, the core of the cybermemorial. Yet while the kinesphere and kinespheric memory remain bound to the body, the movement memory stored in the CD-ROM is "excorporated". Storing and remembering are separated from the body, released from their tie to the body through various intermediate operations, and made virtual in the Net. In this way, the effects that develop out of this extended ludic region for the relationship of body and space overlap. This has been welcomed from all sides and with nearly naive trust in the

expansion possibilities of the prosthetic body in virtual space. The "transhuman" re-embodiment of the moving body in cyberspace perhaps marks a further station in the instrumentalisation process of cultural history, in the development of technologies which Michel de Certeau termed "the apparatuses of incarnation". From another perspective, the body memory in virtual space comes across as being paradoxical. Isn't the multimedia, electronically-linked archive of movement on CD-ROM an extended form of writing? The body of William Forsythe, the system's author, is enclosed within this storage chamber. His body? Or rather his simulation, in perfectly reproduced movements from Forsythe's "lecture demonstrations", which allow every trace of movement to appear as a graphic image on the computer screen? Transported into cyberspace via scanner, this is precisely what this "memory-body" documents from the movement archive: the disappearance of the body. Enclosed within the virtual theatre of memory as in a sarcophagus ('sarcophagus' means 'meat eater'), the edifice of the digital storage of memory raises itself above the empty space of fleeting dance; choreography – transcription – as the epitaph of dance.

Disturbance in Balance – Chance and Memory

Kafka, who once said that he wasn't a good swimmer, speaks of the memory of "not swimming":

> I can swim like the others, only I have a better memory than the others, I have not forgotten my former inability to swim. But since I have not forgotten it, my ability to swim is of no avail and I cannot swim after all.[14]

Can we unlearn our ability to execute skilful, acquired movements (apart from disturbances of the brain and of the nervous system)? Can we remember the status of "not being able" to carry out a movement after the fact? And can we arbitrarily forget what has engraved itself in the procedural memory of the body – complex, automated movements such as swimming, riding a bicycle, or simply walking?

Through a reflection of this kind on the apparently self-evident nature of movement and its remembering repetition, the concept of 'going' or 'walking' (*gehen*) has become interesting for the modern period. Neurologists and researchers of artificial intelligence today ask how, taking the interconnected language and movement processes as an example, 'going' is represented in the brain as an image of movement: What does the image that Marc Johnson called "The Body in the Mind" look like? And how are the metaphors of the verb 'to go' mentally reconstructed – for example, the saying 'that goes against the grain with me'? Not only science, but also

dance poses hypotheses on going or walking. For in the final analysis, dance is the art form of placing steps (pas). Thus, the discovery of walking – simply walking – as the embodiment of movement and its transitoriness also becomes an occasion for self-reflection in choreography. Rilke emphatically writes in his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, dedicated to the deceased dancer, that dance is the "transposing / of all transience into stepping".[15] But one could respond to Rilke by slightly changing his words, since at the same time the perception of movement becomes the "dismantling of all movement within the stepping". For with the development of chronophotography, that form of media technology located somewhere between photography and film, its prominent inventors Marey and Muybridge did nothing else but indeed arrest the division of the movements of walking or running into infinitely long sequences of individual images that fix every phase of the temporal process and transfer it into diagrams. From 1867 onwards, Marey developed recording machines that transcribed step sequences that cannot be followed with the naked eye (for example, a horse's gallop) into bar diagrams. He called these records of movement "synoptical notations" after the type of musical score, "the type of music" whose sounds had been "written by the horse himself".[16]

Walking becomes the paradigm of "Postmodern Dance", which, as it is known, no longer wants to be 'dance', yet nonetheless reformulates dance as performance. Merce Cunningham and the group of his pupils that met in the Judson Church Theatre worked on such concepts of *events* as 'non-dance'. Can a dancer walk as a non-dancer does? And when does walking – simply walking and nothing more – become definable as choreography? Douglas Dunn was asked in an interview: "Does walking down the street come close to your idea of what dancing is about?" – And the answer was: "As an analogy, yes [...] on the one hand, the connection to order – the streets, the traffic lights, and regulations, etc. – and, on the other hand, the complexity, because all those different intentions find their way in and around each other."[17]

As an everyday activity, walking becomes a pattern of choreography as cartography: an act of describing paths of motion and their crossings; nothing less than a mapping brought forth by a deliberate choreography led by chance. And this choreography is not the transcription of a previously written pattern of movement, but rather a movement of reading and writing in one. Michel de Certeau thus termed the connection between walking and spatial notation a game of tactile perception and of kinesic acquisition. "The play of the steps is a formation of spaces [...] they cannot be localised, because they create the space itself. They are just as intangible as Chinese letters, the contours of which the speaker sketches with a finger into his

palm."[18] Walking is a mode of reading and writing chronotopical maps whose points are read together in movement – a script which renders invisible the very process that made it possible. Every script of movement replaces and occupies, just as the motion of writing and reading itself does, and becomes a trace that takes the place of praxis.

Can this everyday practice – walking – be turned around into a process which goes beyond the ordinary? Could this movement be "unlearned" by observing the failures with microscopic precision in a close reading? Then walking would always also be a kind of falling. The self-evident coordination of the limbs in motion contains, in the moments of transition, an element of disorder. Laurie Anderson wonderfully formulated this paradox of disturbance in the apparently ordered movement of walking:

> You're walking [...] and you don't always realise it but you're always falling. With each step [...] you fall. You fall forward a short way and then catch yourself. Over and over [...] you are falling [...] and then [you] catch yourself. You keep falling and catching yourself falling. And this is how you are walking and falling at the same time.[19]

Contemporary dance theatre works with precisely this. The peculiarity and precision of its work with the body is rooted in a fundamental mistrust in the self-evident processes of known movements – whether these are virtuoso dance steps, mechanised working movements, or schematic acts of communication. In William Forsythe's work with the body, for example, the processes of dissolving of fixed patterns result from an exact observation of the codified steps and poses of the *danse d'école*. Gaps and dislocations are allowed into these patterns – like a weaving error in a fabric or dropped stitches in a knit pattern. For this, an exact knowledge and analysis of the traditional systems of movement are required – whether they be the code of classical ballet, the tradition of folkloristic dance, or the stylised pattern of steps in Japanese No theatre. "Reading *anew* that which has been handed down means interpreting it 'incorrectly'."[20] That would mean making the code of classical ballet "lively in an incorrect way" – as Forsythe comments on his manner of "reading" in an interview. The triumph of ballet lies in its virtuoso techniques of antigravity and the accompanying celebration of equilibrium. Such an "incorrect" interpretation could now, as with Forsythe, consist in making the falling out of this balance – disequilibrium – the subject of work with the body, instead of the breathtaking balance. The illusion of floating on point, which constituted the ballerina's aura in the 19th century, is henceforth broken, for the slipping out of the

precarious pose of the arabesque is not avoided, as is the case in classical ballet, but instead becomes the source of a continuation of a movement, the form of which stems from the surplus of energy released by the fall and by the still uncertain goal of this falling movement. The figure of this "released" arabesque is therefore not predrawn, but rather produces itself in an unmanageable process of movement. The breathtaking experience of the virtuoso control of the body in perfect balance – *The Vertiginous Thrill of Exactitude*[21] – makes room for another, equally breathtaking experience: playing with the disturbance of balance, with the loss of control. This is an experience which, in Forsythe's words, finally signifies dissolution, "letting yourself evaporate":

> The more you can let go of your control and give it over to a kind of transparency in the body, a feeling of disappearance, the more you will be able to grasp differentiated form and differentiated dynamics [...] You try to divest your body of movement, as opposed to thinking that you are producing movement. So it would not be like pushing forward into space and invading space – it would be like leaving your body in space.[22]

Is the disturbance of balance that moment in which we forget a learned movement – at least for a moment? And can this experience – and also the movement spontaneously unfolding out of it – be brought about voluntarily? Stumbling, falling ... these certainly allow themselves to be conventionally represented in pantomime, precisely as "disturbances", as failures in motion; the long tradition of this type of representation in theatre, and not only in the area of comedy, provides enough examples of this. But how does one make falling out of the order of equilibrium the object of dance, without just simply acting it out? Does it work, on the other hand, as a "skilled" demonstration of such disorganisation, so that the impression arises with Forsythe's critics of a "virtuoso limp", or, as with Meg Stuart, of a "corporeal stutter"?

Such questions do not only apply to the "paradox of walking as falling", but rather to the paradox of body representation in general. Phenomenological observations of these forms of being – between stability and lability, between the unconscious "being a body" and the reflexive "having a body", between standing and falling – concentrate on the anthropological side of kinaesthesia. Referring back to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, the philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels asks: "What does a world look like in which a 'free fall' is possible which says more than just a coincidence or accident? What does a world look like in which bodies are looking for places to land, without already feeling solid ground beneath them?"[23] Man was already described in Kant's anthropology as a being possessing a disturbance in balance, as though he

were standing "on the edge of an abyss".[24] Man's upright gait carries its lability along with it, in a physiological as well as metaphorical sense, a lability "which comes to expression in different forms of the lapse. Only he who (or that which) can stand can also fall over. Falling represents here an extreme possibility. In falling, we touch the boundaries of our being. In falling over or falling down, we enter a movement that slips out of our control. The body slips out of itself."[25]

The body which precisely in its loss of control "slips out of itself" finds itself in the status of not knowing which prefigures the emancipation from ingrained traces of the memory of movement. Not a point zero of knowledge or a complete forgetting, but a virtual limbo between bodily knowledge and lack of knowledge, between control and the failure of the controlling factor. This interval holds the potential of "another movement", in which the known and the repeatable simultaneously contain the turning point of unlearning – a feature which opens the possibility for unknown, "foreign" movement. This has nothing to do with the aesthetic concept of alienation, nor is it about a masquerade of the familiar and the conventions related to this. Whereas the politics of alienation are based on a change that grows out of an enlightenment concerning difference (a dialectic process which still holds onto the old, the own as the object of criticism), change arises out of the lapse seemingly without a directive and without a stated goal. For this reason, it is not the alienated vestment that corresponds to the phenomenology of the lapse, but rather the attempt to rid the body of (its) movement (as Forsythe says, "to divest your body of movement"). The type of the 'new', of the foreign that can arise out of this (because it is always only a possibility – a possibility which can also be missed) is emerging: in the best case, it is a form of surprise, of surprising oneself. As Douglas Dunn said, "Surprise [...] I'd like to know what dance would look like if the dancer didn't know what he was going to do next."[26]

This thought of a surprise through a movement not deriving from the repetition of the known or from a predictable sequence (as, for example, with functional movement in work or sports) is what characterises the principle of improvisation. The idea of an entirely spontaneous movement which is unique and thus unrepeatable has a long history in anthropology and in aesthetics. It is linked to the fantasy of a primordial, expressive power of human motion *preceding* all language and all social disciplining and located beyond all regularisation. In contrast to this is the knowledge that the movement of the body, however much it runs within codified channels, can never be reproduced in a perfectly identical way. To be precise, every repetition of a remembered movement is overlaid with interferences of the (inner and outer) perception of the moment, and is therefore a bodily work of memory which adjusts the

image of movement of the moment according to the image in the memory in a repetitive process of "similar dissimilarity". How, then, should improvisation be understood? As a bodily movement determined by chance, and not deriving from a specific code of movement? And in what way could the paradox of the (intentional) forgetting of all kinds of patterns of movement stored in the memory be solved? Even as a dance movement concept – such as in "Contact Improvisation", founded by Steve Paxton, or in the choreographed improvisational pieces of Meg Stuart, Amanda Miller, Jonathan Burrows, and William Forsythe – the concept of 'improvisation' denies exactly those layers of memory which are fixed within certain systems as codified movement and are readable as such. Improvisation defines itself as movement arising out of a lack of rules, as a "non-code" driven by emotions or by chance. Are the general forgetting and unlearning that are the prerequisites here – the prescribed lapse in memory – conceivable? Does not the fact that improvisation workshops exist – as well as "Improvisation Technologies" – suggest that the "unlearnable of unlearning" is also being built into a pedagogic framework and that the "lack of rules" of improvised movement is itself being translated into patterns? Certainly, for a movement which in a strangely foreign way has cut off every reference to known and recognisable bodily motions is perhaps "virtually" imaginable. But would it be readable? It would probably still be read and made legible upon being transferred into the contexts of its representation. In this way, however, it would attain that very effect which improvisation achieves at best: rendering familiar patterns of movement meaningless – a ReMembering capable of occurring precisely in that lapse within a smooth memory of movement. In this way, improvisation does away with the "ceasefire between choreography and dance", shifts the weight from the fixation – the cenotaph of choreography – to the event of movement of the dancing body whose complexity cannot be reproduced: "The purpose of improvisation is to overcome choreography, to come back to what dance was originally."[27]

What level of abstraction do the experimental orders of movement reach in the modern period? Has the deconstruction of frequently-used images and codes of movement indeed reached the boundary of unreadability? The deeper and the more precisely one penetrates into a movement – 'walking', for example – the more abstract it becomes. Is this choreographic microanalysis a reflex reaction to the increasing tendency towards minimalism and abstraction of Western society? Must one then be "at least as abstract as the stock market", as the choreographer Mary Overlie said, "in order to be really creative today"?[28]

Have the body's *Pathosformeln*, those "formulae of expressing extreme passion", disappeared in 20th-century dance, as they have in art? Do the expressive gestures

that were certain to be easily decoded still exist? Body images which are legible as the language of emotion, which "speak" directly and conjure up that other movement: the movement of the soul?

They have not disappeared; they can be found in other areas of our culture, having departed from art. Cannot grand gestures of tumultuous enthusiasm or the *Pathosformel* of falling to one's knees with the hands raised to the heavens be seen today in soccer stadiums, instead of in churches and exhibition spaces? But it is not just the dislocating of body images in the topography of Western culture; the images of the body and their expressive movements have become transformed – their shape deformed as though under an immense pressure, their movements distorted and chopped up, proffering no tribute to an already known ideal of beauty and grace. These bodies unleash another fragile and threatened beauty, however, in the process of their "ReMembering"; an unforgettable contact with foreign movements and body images reveals itself to the gaze that does not shy away from taking a closer look.

It is the borderline situations of the body in motion whose imposition grows out of a strange hybridity. The hypermobility of the body reveals an impression which is nearly impossible to comprehend: beauty of vanishing form – a "poetry of disappearance" – in the rejections and punctual deformities of movements that risk the unexpectable. That also means, particularly for the viewer, casting a glance into the chaos, into a process of the confusing of (body) parts, which can be read and collected only at a certain price: The task of memory – that double ReMembering – is divided among those moving and those watching the movement. And this process thus always becomes a journey of remembering through the phantasms of one's own body history. And is this landscape not also marked by deformity? By misunderstanding and misreading, which – in the limbo of subjective memory – rebuilds the rules of language and allows a world of spirits to arise out of it? It is as though the ideas in our body memory could no longer get rid of the memory of a history of damages.

One such story is told by Walter Benjamin in his *Berlin Childhood around Nineteen-Hundred*:

> In an old children's verse, a character called Muhme (Aunt) Rehlen appears. Because I didn't know what 'Muhme' was, this being became a spirit for me: the 'Mummerehlen' [...] 'I want to tell you something about the Mummerehlen.' The little verse is distorted, and yet the entire distorted world of childhood is contained izn it."[29]

Distortion – mishearing and misreading – is the poetic core of a story whose spirits cannot be driven from memory. Writing appears in place of that false movement which makes something beloved be absent – which is the story of Orpheus – and which makes the subject's loneliness apparent. Writing, thus ends Benjamin's story, is the epitaph of those movements which have always been disguised in the memory by distortion. "Had I even just once had a glance of the not-yet-distorted," wrote Benjamin in 1932, "I would have been consoled for the rest of my life."[30]

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton, New York and London, 1942, 13.

2. Ibid., 125.

3. This is how Rilke describes the death of Vera Ouckama Knoop in a letter to Witold Hulewicz on 13 November 1925.

4. See Wolf Singer, "Zur Selbstorganisation kognitiver Strukturen", *Gehirn und Bewusstsein*, ed. E. Pöppel, Weinheim 1989.

5. *Das Gedächtnis, Theaterschrift*, no. 8, Brussels 1995, 202.

6. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (1896), trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, New York 1919, 248.

7. Ibid., 93.

8. Domenico da Piacenza, "De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi. Dela arte di Ballare et Danzare", quoted in D. R. Wilson, *Early Dance Circle, Sources for Early Dance, Series 1: Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Cambridge 1988, 8f. Italian original: "[...] e nota che fantasmata / e vna presteza corporalle laquale e mossa cum lo intelecto dela mexura dicta imprima disopra facendo requia acadauno tempo che pari hauer ueduto lo capo di meduxa / como dice elpoeta / cioe che facto el motto sij tutto di piedra inquello instante / et ininstante mitti ale / como falcone che per paica mosso sia segonda la riegola disopra [...]"

9. Michel Foucault, in Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, *Der Faden ist gerissen*, Berlin 1977, 26.

10. See Christel Römer, "William Forsythe's *Artifact*. Versuch einer Annährerung durch Sprache", *William Forsythe. Tanz und Sprache*, ed. Gaby von Rauner, Frankfurt am Main 1993, 27–46.

11. See Stefan Wachter, "Maschinensehen. Das Erkennen menschlicher Bewegungen", *Form und Zweck*, no. 16, 32–40.

12. William Forsythe, *Improvisation Technologies. A Tool for the Analytical Dance Eye*, ed. Centre for Art and Media Technology Karlsruhe, Ostfildern 1999.

13. William Forsythe in the programme booklet for *Eidos:Telos*, ed. Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main 1995, 39.

14. Franz Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Posthumous Prose Writings*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, London 1954, 327.

15. Rilke 1942 (note 1), 105.

16. Quoted from Marta Braun, *Picturing Time. The Work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)*, Chicago and London 1992, 28.

17. Sylvère Lotringer, *New Yorker Gespräche*, Berlin 1983, 59f.

18. Michel de Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns*, Berlin 1988, 188f.

19. Quoted in *Parallax*, ed. Städtische Bühnen Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main 1989, 13.

20. Felix Philipp Ingold, *Das Buch im Buch*, Berlin 1988, 112.

21. As Forsythe titled one of his smaller pieces (1996), with which he paid reverence in his slightly ironic way to this fascination for ballet.

22. Forsythe 1995 (note 13), 33.

23. Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinnesschwellen. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*, vol. 3, Frankfurt am Main 1999, 217.

24. Immanuel Kant, *Mutmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, quoted in Waldenfels, ibid.

25. Waldenfels, 219.

26. Lotringer 1983 (note 17), 55.

27. Forsythe 1999 (note 12), 25.

28. Lotringer 1983 (note 17), 132.

29. Walter Benjamin, *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, 59.

30. Ibid., 60.