

# PERFORMING THE MEMORIES

## Methodologies on Archiving, Recalling and Foretelling with Oral History in Dance and Performance

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Performování vzpomínek.  
Metodologie archivace, vzpomínání  
a předpovídání pomocí orální historie  
v tanci a performanci

### Abstract

This article explores how oral history can function as a performative and epistemological tool to engage with the embodied knowledge of dancer-choreographers from Southeast Europe. Drawing on 50 interviews and archival material from Tanzquartier Wien, it examines how personal memories, bodily practices, and translocal artistic experiences challenge dominant Western narratives in contemporary dance historiography. The study introduces the concept of *body archaeologies* to trace and activate fluid, multidirectional forms of dance knowledge, situated between archive and body, memory and movement. Through artistic-research methods such as *transcripts as scores* and (p)re-enactments, a framework emerges for revisiting and reshaping European dance histories – one that positions oral history not as a supplementary tool, but as a transformative, relational practice capable of destabilising linear historiography and institutional canons.

### Keywords

oral history, contemporary dance, Southeast Europe, embodied knowledge, body archaeologies, archive studies, (p)re-enactment, dance historiography, artistic research, Tanzquartier Wien, multidirectional memory, post-socialist Europe, score as method, memory and movement, institutional critique

### Abstrakt

Studie zkoumá, jak může orální historie fungovat jako performativní a epistemologický nástroj pro ztělesnění znalosti tanečnicků- choreografů z jihovýchodní Evropy. Na základě 50 rozhovorů a archivních materiálů z Tanzquartier Wien ukazuje, jak osobní vzpomínky, tělesné praktiky a translokální umělecké zkušenosti zpochybňují dominantní západní narativy v současné taneční historiografii. Studie zavádí koncept *archeologie těla*; sleduje a aktivuje fluidní formy taneční vědy, rozložené mezi archivem a tělem, pamětí a pohybem. Prostřednictvím umělecko-výzkumných metod, jako jsou *přepisy coby partitury* a (p)re-enactments, vzniká rámec pro revizi a přetváření evropských tanečních dějin – rámec, který staví orální historii nikoli jako doplňkový nástroj, ale jako transformativní, vztahovou praxi schopnou destabilizovat lineární historiografii a institucionalizované kánony.

### Klíčová slova

orální historie, současný tanec, jihovýchodní Evropa, ztělesněné vědění, archeologie těla, archivní studia, (p)re-enactment, taneční historiografie, umělecký výzkum, Tanzquartier Wien, vícesměrná paměť, postsocialistická Evropa, partitura jako metoda, paměť a pohyb, institucionální kritika

*One of my main – it was really a cultural shock for me – I was finishing the school, I was finishing the army right after the school, and there was a guy coming from France, Robert Bertier was his name, [...] he was trying to invite the Choreography High School from Bucharest in a big festival in France [...] And I remember I've been to this festival [...] I went with the choreography on Pink Floyd, it was like 90, in 90, really 90, Pink Floyd it was the choreography... I graduated with... so it was still before 89 when I graduated with... in 88 I graduated, and it was really like... I could find maybe this, I hope... It's really funny, you will laugh like crazy because I'm with hair like these big ones [he points to his head] which is not so easy, it was not so easy to have big grown hair at that time, those who had like a moustache or a beard, big hair, they were like... perceived as artists, intellectuals, dangers – those who opposes, you know. But anyway, we as kids, as a student, it was easier a bit, in an art school. And then I had like, you know, the... black... how do you call it... the punk guys, they have it... I had one like this [he indicates a mohawk comb on his head and clicks his tongue] ...totally dressed in black and there was like really revolutionary, hitting the wall and with the head and with my... with a... with a fist... and being really like angry towards something, you know, towards... oppression towards Officialities. And it was, of course, not so obvious for the people but... still people were perceiving this as an act of resistance against, I don't know, this craziness. And then I went to France, and I presented this moment, and it was so stupid actually. Because I noticed there, all the guys... having a different technique and doing moving completely different like... having like, in their bodies, other information – it was a shock for me to see other bodies coming from the Western world moving totally different. And this was for me the first cultural shock I ever had in confrontation with the imaginary of Western worlds, which goes really deep into your body actually.*

(VIII Oral history transcript, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016)

How do we remember how we danced, and what influenced us? What remains in the body, shaping and transforming it over time? My research on the formation of contemporary dance in Southeast Europe after the end of the Cold War engages with a multiplicity of histories and micro-histories along these lines. Drawing on the theorisation of oral history within dance studies (cf. Friedman 2002; 2006; 2010), I explore how legacies of dancer-choreographers and their body and movement histories are created and preserved – through memory, and as an extension of the archive and its materials, toward what might be called *body archaeologies*.<sup>1</sup> This approach challenges Western-dominant historiographies and proposes alternative models of contemporaneity in dance.

In 2015/2016, I conducted 50 oral history interviews with dancer-choreographers in Southeast Europe (from the cities of Bucharest, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrade, Sofia and Skopje) and investigated how they have inscribed themselves in the European paradigms of contemporary dance that have prevailed since the late 1980s and to what extent they have helped to shape these paradigms with their strongly conceptual-artistic positioning. The starting point for the interviews were the archive materials of the Tanzquartier Wien. By positioning itself as one of the first dance houses in Europe and as the “‘bridgehead’ of a new Europe”<sup>2</sup> in the field of contemporary dance, Tanzquartier Wien created from 2001 on spaces and formats that initiated discourse as well as European networks to promote exchange between dance scenes in the so-called Western and Eastern parts of Europe in the form of a transfer and competence centre. With an artists-in-residence-programme as well as festivals, labs and theory formats, numerous dancer-choreographers, especially from Southeast Europe, were invited to Vienna, with the aim to overcome inner-European borders and differences from the Cold War era without creating a closed entity. Using the example of these dancer-choreographers, the attempts of the Tanzquartier Wien were critically investigated – by questioning them with my oral histories and by placing them in relation to the artistic activities of the dancer-choreographers in translocal contexts, their social perception and the associated (un)availability of contemporary dance as an art form in the Eastern parts of Europe.

The article investigates how oral history can serve as a methodological tool to engage with the embodied knowledge of these dancer-choreographers and to reframe European contemporary dance historiography through a kinesic and embodied access. My research began with five boxes of archive material from the Tanzquartier Wien on its so-called East/West exchange with European dance scenes between 2001 and 2009. Understood as a spectrum of possible diagnoses of time, it observes how – and which – stories are transferred into the present day, concentrating on dance knowledge conveyed by contemporary witnesses, which has so far been (largely) ignored. The subject of the study is therefore the circulation of dance knowledge, with a particular focus on how personal memories, body practices, and artistic experiences shape non-canonical dance

- 1 I developed the concept of *body archaeologies* for the specific use of the methodology of oral history in my study in order to define its potential as an artistic-research knowledge practice – i.e. as a possible tool for dance research – and as a reference point of the body as an archive. Essential to this is that my research is characterised by the decision to follow dance practices and to use the interconnectedness of the dancer-choreographers’ self-understandings as transitions between different temporal and spatial layers of history and to find alternative forms of representation for their verbal and physical expressions in the oral history interviews. This concept reflects, not least, the explorative movements of dancer-choreographers in their training, who in the 1990s began to turn away from their original training, shaped by socialist doctrines, and increasingly embraced forms of ‘self-education’.
- 2 Translated by the author: “‘Brückenkopf’ eines neuen Europas” (Gareis 2004).

histories. By combining archive materials with my oral history interviews, it proposes a methodology that understands memory as multidirectional (cf. Rothberg 2021) and the body as a site of historical and artistic inscription. The purpose is to develop a framework that situates oral history not as a supplement to institutional archives, but as an epistemological shift towards a performative and relational understanding of dance history. The article is structured in two parts: the first critically examines the role of archives and multidirectional memory in constructing historiographical narratives; the second develops artistic-research practices – such as *transcripts as scores* and strategies of (p)re-enactment – as tools to trace and activate body-based knowledge.

The aim of my explorations was not to reconstruct the history of contemporary dance in Southeast Europe, as this has always been inherent in an “ideology of reconstruction as the possibility of witnessing the past again as past” (Franko 2018: 9). Instead, the dual (un)availability of Southeast European contemporary dance, which is present both in the archives, networks and programme planning of German-speaking institutions and in the social structures of Southeast Europe, is to be revealed and supplemented by alternative knowledge webs. Because, as Bojana Kunst describes, “Western gaze is therefore still hesitant when it comes to attributing autonomy and potentiality of the body to the Eastern practices, and it rather perceived it not just as simply different or close, but as un-articulated, ‘still not there’, confused [...]”. This blind Western gaze, particularly regarding contemporary dance in the Eastern parts of Europe, has been shaped by decades of prejudice and a persistent lack of awareness or understanding of the complexities of Eastern European experiences. It produced a vision of “the body of the East” as “something which was ‘not being of the moment’, which was somehow ‘doubly late’ [...]”. Instead of perpetuating these narrative patterns, I investigated the body’s potentiality in artistic practices, sketching out “different models of contemporariness” within the context of European contemporary dance (Kunst 2002: n.pag.). To this end, I focused on the translocal nature of the body and the movement histories of dancer-choreographers who were invited to Tanzquartier Wien, and the resulting circulations of knowledge. Accordingly, the emphasis of my research lies on a microscopic level – on the intricate webs of knowledge shared between the Eastern and Western parts of Europe. The oral histories of these dancer-choreographers are therefore not simply a means to reconstruct dance history or to recover what has been lost – a gesture which, within the logic of East/West exchange, would only reinforce post-capitalist narratives. Instead, they serve as opportunities to reimagine these micro-histories and to generate alternative models of contemporaneity. These on a heterochronic strategy, with the help of which the models “in a time that cannot be precisely named [...] with the deliberate blurring and mixing of time levels” (Jeschke – Breuss 2016: 85) and thus undermine the question “What is contemporary?”. The resulting dance histories offer the possibility of putting them into perspective in such a way that they retain their fluidity and movement and thus reveal options for developments: to explore a “body of the east” as a body and movement history of dancer-choreographers always in an “in-between with all its different possibilities” (Kunst 2002: n.pag.) and to approach the materialities and temporalities of their embodied knowledge.

It is only through the generation of this kind of dance knowledge – which conveys dance history through the body and negotiates it both linguistically and physically during the interview – that the (re-)integration of the body and movement histories of the dancer-choreographers becomes possible. The interviews are focused on joint research and (self-)reflexive sharing and participation – in the sense of a “relational understanding of human action [...] and] forms of indirect participation”

(Rothberg 2019: 13). This means that in the process of generating oral histories (in the act of the interview as well as the transcription and further transmission), joint responsibility is assumed for the translocal histories that emerge. Sharing memories in the interaction and dialogue of the interview opens a plurality of perspectives on past events. This is not about the question

*What is the history of dance in Southeast Europe?*

but the question

*How can I refer to the dance histories of Southeast European dancer-choreographers and their models of contemporaneity from the perspective of the Tanzquartier Wien archive materials?*

Action-oriented approaches – such as making reference, entering into dialogue and establishing relationships – make it possible to generate a multidirectional perspective that identifies the polyphony and different pasts of the body and movement stories in the process of remembering. Instead of developing a superordinate narrative, the relationships between the stories and their interconnectedness in the now are transferred into a spectrum of collective memory. This exploration of a communicative inventory of memories initially starts from a singular artistic life story and concentrates on the eventfulness and materiality of the body and movement stories articulated in the oral histories and thus on their revisionist potential as a collection of personal memories that can provide access to a culture of memory in European contemporary dance.

### Ruptured archives: Narratives of embodied knowledge and their materialities

In this sense, my research is also a counter-institutional attempt, rethinking the role of archives as well as the question of what we do need to create a new understanding of histories which are not institutionalised and canonised in these circulation processes of knowledge. In this way, the idea of the archive as an organisational unit and repository is ruptured and expanded by incorporating a “dynamisation of the concept of the archive” through embodied knowledge:

“Two directions can be identified in this regard: The arts focus on proven archival practices, systematics and orientations, while science focuses on the archiving of art, especially event and time-based arts” (Bührer – Lauke 2020: 9–10).<sup>3</sup>

The phenomena mentioned in the quote have long been discussed in dance and archives have been placed in relation to movement, mobility and performativity (cf. Foellmer – Schmidt – Schmitz 2018; Brandstetter – Klein 2013; Thurner – Wehren 2010). In this respect, my examination of the archive materials of Tanzquartier Wien is less about reconstructing a historical period than about conveying the various dimensions of historicity and materiality inherent in them. In the East/West exchange depicted by

3 Translated by the author: “Zwei Stoßrichtungen lassen sich diesbezüglich ausmachen: Die Künste nehmen bewährte archivarische Praktiken, Systematiken und Ausrichtungen in den Blick, während die Wissenschaft die Archivierung von Kunst, insbesondere ereignis- und zeitbasierter Künste, fokussiert” (Bührer – Lauke 2020: 9–10).

the archive materials,<sup>4</sup> artistic practices and concepts of the interviewed dancer-choreographers are embedded in their content and framed by the discourses set by Tanzquartier Wien, but are not explicitly negotiated. To pursue these, I expanded my archival practice to include the method of oral history to generate mobile movement research with the help of contemporary witness interviews on both a verbal and physical level.

Two approaches are central to the framing presented here: First, the search for the dancer-choreographers' self-understandings through oral histories and their (un)availability in the archival materials of Tanzquartier Wien. This approach leads to a reflection on one's own archival practice – not as a matter of preservation, but as a process of transformation and negotiation of knowledge and information. It also opens up space for alternative historiographical practices. Second, a reflection on the temporality of the historical, and on the theoretical potential of the body and of movement.

Perspectivised from the present, this results in an examination of one's own tradition in a double sense: on the academic level as a historiographical reflection in and about the archive, and on the artistic level as a reflection of the transfer and transformation processes of the dancers' bodies. The realisation of these processes of the production and circulation of knowledge is therefore evident on two levels: on the one hand in the East/West exchange of Tanzquartier Wien, which can be traced above all based on the archive materials, and on the other in the oral history interviews conducted, which not only depict processes and physical states that have already taken place via memory, but also actualise these during the interview as a *performative act*, thus creating a further web of knowledge.

The collected knowledge is therefore in transition: not only between the different time levels, which are marked in constant forwards and backwards movements by the local contexts shaped in the 1980s and 1990s, the 2000s at Tanzquartier Wien and the moments of the 2015/2016 interviews in a now changed European dance landscape, but also between East and West, between artists and institutions, between artistic and academic practice, between past and future, between archive and body and between language and movement.

As a basis for these webs of knowledge in transition, the oral histories initiate an interrogation of the archive materials of Tanzquartier Wien, which in turn creates space to propose a version of history as possible and future based on the interviews and their transcripts. This means writing dance history in the sense of body and movement histories, revealing their dynamics, new perspectives and shifts. With their focus on the transformations of the body, the oral histories become transtemporal extrapolations that produce a presence and refer to both the past and the future. With the help of the articulation of experiences and memories in the oral histories, I would like to explore (dance) history in its performative and dance-based dimensions. For “[t]he focus on movement shows that the bodies in dance are not only projection surfaces of (cultural) discourses in which statement and visibility meet and intersect in processes of (semiotisable) coding and de-coding. The virulent node of dance is also determined

4 The archive materials from Tanzquartier Wien, which were transferred in 2013 to the *Derra de Moroda Dance Archives* at the University of Salzburg, primarily include materials originating from the communications department of the dance house: flyers, posters, programmes, evening sheets, promotional materials, press kits, media information, press reviews, special supplements, as well as various publications. Originating from the fields of marketing and public relations, these materials primarily reflect the public image of the dance house. In addition, I spent several weeks reviewing recordings in the Tanzquartier Wien media library. According to the media center of Tanzquartier Wien, approximately 3,000 recordings from the period under the artistic direction of Sigrid Gareis exist (as of February 2015).



by a memory of the body, a kinetic and kinaesthetic experience that cannot be enclosed in a semiotic system. Dance has generated a heterogeneous type of knowledge and continues to do so” (Haitzinger – Jeschke 2005: 31).<sup>5</sup>

In order to create an awareness of that dimension, my explorations focus on that ‘heterogeneous type of knowledge’ and its basis in the memories and (kinetic and kinaesthetic) experiences of the body, thus on a movement-oriented approach to dance historiography – following a paradigm that is still virulent in dance historiography: a space for a history of dance; a moving historiography in which the archive materials of the Tanzquartier Wien are expanded to include the articulations of the dancer-choreographers and thus, re-contextualised – as knowledge webs that present possible models for the contemporaneity of European dance histories.

### *Body Archaeologies: Across Time, Space, and Networks*

By focusing on the materiality of history and thus on dance historical corporealities, the understanding of practices around archives and historiography also shifts. The function of memory formation is illuminated via the material as well as medial properties of sources, memories and physical articulations and the circulating knowledge of dance and artistic practices, which is absent in the archive materials, can be (re)experienced. Made accessible through oral histories, this knowledge can be fruitfully linked to the idea of archival practice and dance history can be understood in its potential for sensualisation and as a creative act. For this sensualisation in the act of transferring different webs of knowledge, a different logic in the sense of *body archaeologies* is set against the fixation on documents present in historiography.

This logic assumes that by shifting the focus to materiality and transferring the understanding from the historiographical to the archaeological, documents – and in particular the generated interviews – can be understood as found objects within the research process.<sup>6</sup> These found objects do not merely provide content on a superficial level, but also embody materialities of dance, movement, and the body itself. While collecting the oral histories, new stories kept emerging as I followed the dancer-choreographers and their networks (e.g. Nomad Dance Academy). Based on the recommendations and mediated contacts of the dancer-choreographers already interviewed, a diachronic web of knowledge gradually unfolded. In this web, the question of “What appears?” – and thus the epistemological engagement with the

5 Translated by the author: “[d]er Fokus auf Bewegung zeigt, dass die Körper im Tanz nicht nur Projektionsflächen von (kulturellen) Diskursen sind, in denen Aussage und Sichtbarkeit in Prozessen der (semiotisierbaren) Kodierung wie der De-Kodierung aufeinandertreffen und sich überkreuzen. Der virulente Knotenpunkt des Tanzes ist auch bestimmt von einer Erinnerung des Körpers, einer kinetischen wie kinästhetischen Erfahrung, die nicht in ein semiotisches System eingeschlossen werden kann. Tanz hat einen heterogenen Typus von Wissen generiert und tut das weiterhin” (Haitzinger – Jeschke 2005: 31).

6 Besides Jeff Friedman’s dance-specific approach to Oral History, I based my theoretical framework on Ritchie 2015; Roms – Edwards 2011. Average interview lasted three hours. There were no debriefings or follow-up questions about any gaps or misunderstandings. Instead, I concentrated on the form of ‘first-person accounts’ and the ‘debriefings’. In this sense, no complete ‘life histories’ were generated, but the potential of the first layer of memory was recorded in so-called ‘audio snapshots’. By creating empty spaces in the recordings and transcripts of the interviews, I want to make it possible to understand history as something future and in the sense of its continuation. Accordingly, I developed body discourses and concepts based on linguistically and physically articulated dance-artistic practices that later served as the basis for my artistic research approach of (p)re-enacting the collected material.

processes in the contemporary dance scenes of Southeast Europe – came to the fore, while the narrowly defined curatorial framework of the Tanzquartier Wien programme gradually lost its significance. Stories that had previously eluded institutional archiving began to fan out, opening up different dimensions, temporal layers, and spaces.

As a researcher, I am thus, as it were, an actor who moves in an in-between and always influences it in my positionality: this in-between is formed from the dynamics of the heterogeneous materials and media of my research as well as my positioning in the interviews, whereby I engage with these dimensions of discursive and non-discursive knowledge and expose myself to the processes of constellation and compilation in the sense of Rothberg's "implicated subject" (Rothberg 2019: 12). Not least, this sets in motion a reflection on what understanding of history prevails in dance and how this influences how historical events and developments – especially of European dance histories – can be linked to each other – just as the decades-long division in Eastern and Western Europe was reflected (or, in a certain phase, probably also suppressed) in contemporary dance.

By focusing on the dialogue-based and dynamic mediation and translation of knowledge on a linguistic and physical level in the immediacy of an interview situation, oral histories create new spaces for communication and action to develop new memories, new concepts around an archival practice and a new way of thinking and so create access to previously unavailable stories. This enables dance and performance scenes that are often not recognised either locally or internationally to be heard and experienced as part of European contemporary dance histories – and hence to change the status assigned to the artistic practices of dancer-choreographers from Southeast Europe from a Western perspective, which Bojana Kunst described as out of date, absent and being considered as inarticulate, i.e. without a clear or incomprehensible language and voice.

As an extension of the Tanzquartier Wien archive material, the oral history interviews conducted have the function of making these voices audible, visible and tangible – and revealing their bodily-discursive explorations, which began with the collapse of the socialist states and the upheavals that began in those countries of Southeast Europe and led to intensive body explorations. These articulations materialise as explorative movements in the process of the oral history interviews in the form of fragments of history, splinters of memory and shared experiences. Thus, during my interviews with the dancer-choreographers, who spoke not only about institutional and structural conditions and the discussion of their own artistic work, but in particular about their physical transformations through training and further education contexts as well as translocal networking, a focus on body and movement histories crystallised. These histories are based on a Western European paradigm of contemporary dance – that of the exploration of physical states, which is pursued above all in somatic practices, and which is articulated in the interviews on both a verbal and physical level. Many of the dancer-choreographers I interviewed come from the tradition of classical dance or were career changers and radically turned away from their training contexts with the emergence of contemporary dance developments in the 1990s and 2000s. Instead, they concentrated on practices that gave them the opportunity to question their physicality or to pursue forms of *hypercorporealisation* and a *radical rejection* from their dancers' bodies.

An essential aspect within in these forms of *hypercorporealisation* and a *radical rejection* is that the body and movement histories of the dancer-choreographers are not based on modern or contemporary training contexts and traditional techniques and styles but rather are formed through the constant explorative movements and are handed down less through their identities than through the contexts and contextualisations



of their bodies. This becomes particularly clear in the process of remembering during the interviews and thus led me to the concept of *body archaeologies*. This reflects the explorative movements and the approach to artefacts of a dance education that is based primarily on forms of 'self-education' in the departure that began in the 1990s.

The constant explorative movements appear in the process of remembering: Physical states are scanned, articulated and registered in the interview and their transmissions are conveyed through the descriptions of body images and physical transformations – as something that has become, which is interpreted at the moment of the interview, but not conclusively recorded. In addition, a repertoire of practices and discourses is formed in equal measure. The memories produced by the oral histories and the associated actualisation of certain dance practices are rather fluid relics of what is unavailable in the archive materials (because they are lost or never existed), which are linked to the discourse of research. As frictions of transhistorically formed dance techniques and physical practices, these articulated fluid relics reveal the movement repertoire of the bodies of these dancer-choreographers. On the one hand, they reveal the training contexts of the (post-)socialist states (which were primarily characterised by ballet, folk dance and military service during the Cold War) and, on the other, the influence of contemporary dance practices with which their bodies have been confronted since the 1990s as a result of the increasing opening up to Western Europe.

It is only through the shift towards the archaeological that it becomes possible to analyse the embodied knowledge of dancers and choreographers in terms of change and transformation. It addresses a dance practice beyond its representation through a performance and towards its performative knowledge. In this sense, *body archaeologies* refer not to a place or its functions – such as the idea of the body as an archive – but rather to the practices searching, uncovering, and collecting embodied relics. As an approach, this applies both to the level of archive materials as well as to the level of the body itself and to the questioning of its traces.

### Reconnecting histories: Entangled engagements with memory and knowledge production

Memory plays an essential role in the debate among historians as a theoretical approach, as shown by Michael Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory:

"Our relationship to the past partly determines who we are in the present, but never unambiguously or directly and never without unexpected or even undesirable consequences that connect us to those we see as Other. If one explicitly refers to the productive, intercultural dynamics of multidirectional memory [...] new forms of solidarity and new notions of justice can emerge" (Rothberg 2021: 29).<sup>7</sup>

The literary historian and memory researcher uses the dynamics of memory to trace its intersections instead of following the logic of a competition between victims and memories. This productive utilisation of different sources and the diverse interweaving of memories was a starting point for me to try to grasp contemporary dance histories in Southeast Europe in all their heterogeneity and in their field of

7 Translated by the author: "Unser Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit bestimmt teilweise, wer wir in der Gegenwart sind, allerdings nie eindeutig oder unmittelbar und nie ohne unerwartete oder sogar unerwünschte Konsequenzen, die uns mit jenen verbinden, die wir als Andere ansehen. Bezieht man sich ausdrücklich auf die produktive, interkulturelle Dynamik multidirektionaler Erinnerung [...] können neue Solidaritätsformen und neue Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen entstehen" (Rothberg 2021: 29).

tension of East/West exchange. It was precisely the concern to create new forms of solidarity through oral histories and thus to establish comparative and non-competing perspectives that offered me a way of thinking of the memories of the dancer-choreographers in the context of the institution and artistic practice, as well as to build a bridge to dealing with past dance events. After all, dance's culture of remembrance feeds on its physicality above all from the exploration of methods for appropriating and reactivating past dance knowledge – especially in relation to strategies of reconstructions and re-enactments (cf. Schneider 2019).

Michael Rothberg emphasises that remembering is a relational process, as it always takes place in the present and thus connects the singular, past event with the circumstances of the present and arises in the dialogue between the different stories. It is precisely this field of tension that is also evident in the collected oral histories: between the remembered events at Tanzquartier Wien in the 2000s, the shaping of dancers' bodies through training contexts and institutionalisation processes in the dance scenes of Southeast Europe, which are influenced by Western models on the one hand, and on the other alternative logics of the collaborative, as well as the time of the interviews in 2015/2016 and a developing contemporary dance practice, while the idea of a common Europe changed dramatically, not least due to the refugee crisis and the associated disappointments and disillusionment with this very idea, especially in the Balkan states, as is repeatedly echoed in the interviews. The relationality of memory therefore plays a central role in the interviews as a process of continuous retranslations and points to the transformative potential as well as the construction of contemporary dance stories.

Thinking of memory in a multidirectional way, i.e. understanding it in its plurality, builds a culture of memory guided by perception and intersubjectivity that deals with forms of memory beyond national borders. From the perspective that memories are always subject to negotiation, cross-comparison and borrowing, and that they are both productive and rejecting, new visions of solidarity and justice can be created in a historiographical practice. This multidirectional dynamic of memories becomes visible in the polyphony of oral histories and dissolves supposedly unambiguous attributions. The interview as an opportunity to place oneself in intersubjective relation and share dance knowledge in the exchange of self-understandings and attitudes reveals the dimensions of these dialogical interactions as well as the reciprocal processes of remembering. Here I understand intersubjectivity as a form of attention that opens up levels of the interpersonal as well as a sensory-motoric exchange in the articulation of significant descriptions of body and movement histories and thus generates connectedness and mutual understanding.

The process of remembering makes the oral history interview an active, unpredictable act of dialogue. At the same time, this act refers to the self-constitution of the interviewees, who recount what they consider important and what they remember most vividly (although this is also consciously stimulated by me as the interviewer with open questions) – in other words, a deeply personal process that constantly creates new associations and contexts of meaning. During the investigation of the narrative constructions contained in the recordings and transcripts about the dancer-choreographers' self-understandings, personal processes of action and inventories of communication and memory can be traced, which are reflected on various levels of the interview in relation to signs, information, mediation and perception – and thus make the interview both a performative act and a knowledge practice that mobilises memory, sensation, intention, intuition, experience, and awareness (cf. Althammer 2022).

## After Memory: Recalling and Foretelling dance histories through (p)re-enactments

While narrating memories during the interview, the dancer-choreographers also performing their memories, thus the researcher's body as well as the body of the interviewed dancer-choreographer become a kinesthetic tool. Following this exchange of knowledge and thus a kinesis and embodied access to dance history, together with the dancer and choreographer Vera Sander I developed an artistic research-based approach based on strategies of (p)re-enactments (cf. Althammer – Sander 2023).

On the one hand, we dealt with questions of the transfer of body and movement into other media and vice versa and, on the other, with the development of dance practices for a speculative search for embodied knowledge. To this end, we have developed an approach that replaces body and movement histories with the idea of the body as an archive in favour of the idea of transcripts reflecting *body archaeologies* as scores. The perspective of the interview transcripts as a dance-specific medium – the score – is based on the search for a way of working that conveys physical dimensions – such as the experiences and memories of the dancers as body images, movement repertoires and the resulting kinesis identities to demonstrate how perspectives on materials, situations and the stories associated with them are constantly shifting/transforming.

The movement memories, body descriptions and shared experiences articulated in the interviews thus served as impulses and possibilities for action for a renewed examination. The focus was on the relationality between personal memories and materials. The knowledge webs created by the *transcripts as scores* thus recreate the permanence of the change of perspective and its multidirectional dynamics. Not least, they create a connection between the contemporary and the historical by generating and conveying embodied knowledge as the result of diverse translation processes based on an experience-led approach and physicality as a materialised practice.



Fig 1: Sound collage from the Artistic Research format *Performing the Memories* at the Centre for Contemporary Dance (CCD), University of Music and Dance Cologne, June 2022.  
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Together with students from the Centre for Contemporary Dance (CCD) at the University for Music and Dance Cologne, we developed the *Performing the Memories* format in 2022/2023. This gave rise to aesthetic processes that created different media spaces for these memories, illuminated their various layers and relationships and explored the potential of the *transcripts as scores*. The materials, both in their two- and three-dimensional form, inhabited the space, which evoked a constant shift of the viewers' attention from the material to the space and opened it up in the (re)translation of the *transcripts as scores* into a possible physical practice.

The aim was not to recreate the interview situation or the narrated events, but rather to try out a practice in the creative freedom of the performative transformation of

these materials. *Performing the Memories* was an experiment to develop access methods for performative knowledge – i.e. for bodily activity and non-verbal communication focusing on physical experiences (cf. Jeschke 1999: 4) – and to pursue the production of knowledge about the body and movement histories of the interviewed dancer-choreographers simultaneously through, about and above all as an artistic act. Instead of transferring the oral histories into an archive, they were brought into a continuous actualisation, rewriting and transformation through the perspectivisation as scores and by using artistic strategies of (p)re-enactment.

By re-activating a past event, it was broken down into its individual components and subjected to scrutiny, thus revealing structures of the interview and its transcript – i.e. structures of the moment and the medium of transmission. The connections between dance and its medial documentation as well as the mediation of dance practices on an auditory, verbal, written and physical level were also analysed based on the communication levels and action inventories produced in the oral histories. The aim was to open accessible and movable spaces for these body and movement stories. The dance-specific medium of the score was particularly suitable for exploring these possibilities, as it moves for us between trace and draft, thus pointing both to the past and to the future and thus reflecting and interweaving different temporalities, as is also signaled by strategies of (p)re-enactment.

(P)re-enactment here means not only re-enactment in the sense of ‘again and again’, i.e. working with historical material by retrieving it as well as reviewing and critically reflecting on it (cf. Kruschkova 2010), or an artistic re-activation of past dance events and bringing them back into the present or ‘recalling’ them and thus the process of remembering as recalling (cf. Franko 2018: 7). Rather, the artistic strategy of (p)re-enactment is applied in the sense of a creation of new narratives in multidirectional directions, similar to a moving body (cf. Schneider 2019: 122). On the one hand, in Mark Franko’s understanding of ‘recalling’, it is above all the focus on the presence of the dancing subject in dialogue with history, without merely suggesting a before, which can be transferred to the oral histories with their focus on experience and memory as well as the positioning of the interviewed subject in its eventfulness. The questioning of the body functions here as a demonstration of dance traces, which, as mediated perceptions, reveal sections of reality as well as their social frame of reference on which memories are based. Rather, they reveal the transhistorical entanglements of the dancer’s body as a vanished past.

On the other hand, the ‘again and again’ formulated by Krassimira Kruschkova also contains a dimension of temporality, which Rebecca Schneider describes with (P) re-enactments: not only of the act itself in the sense of a re-enactment as a re-performance and re-retrieval or a pre-enactment in the sense of a preparation, but rather as an opening of spaces in time – as transitions and as a variation of an ‘unsuccessful’ repetition:

“What may be interesting about reenactment and preenactment, then, are less the acts themselves than the spaces that they open in time, the possibilities for variation (and stasis) that they pronounce. The tangled between times, or intra-times if you will, that pre- and reenactment open among so-called past, so-called present, and so-called future are vital. The intra-times may be open moments for change, for critique, or for the launchings of alternative trajectories, other futures” (Schneider 2019: 123f).

These dimensions can also be transferred to the dance-specific medium of the score. This is because – unlike a fixed notation system – it can be interpreted freely, contains different temporal levels, often aims to create deviations or failures in a realisation and focuses on the process, not the result – and therefore also on potential for action, which not only refers to what has been documented in the process, but rather to possible futures. Analysing the *transcripts as scores* therefore makes it possible to pursue the question of what potential and scope can be derived from the collected stories. The dance students were able to analyse how the stories (can) emerge, which dynamics and materialities unfold in them and how dancers deal with their function as movement impulses (and less as historical material). This makes it possible to read the collected stories in different ways, to reveal their different layers and thus to shed light on the role of the organisation, mediation and social function of memory. The *transcripts as scores* thus become a tool for creating principles of order and disorder and for translating the performative knowledge contained in the transcripts in the form of memories and experiences.

### Social and material interventions: Concepts for movement research

The memories of the dancer-choreographers become a concept for movement research that unfolds on three levels and goes beyond the linguistic description of body and movement and also conveys pauses, unspoken words, movements, gestures, images, thoughts, emotions – hence performative dimensions – in the transcript:

*The level of temporality:* Each material bears the trace of the reality of the moment in which it releases the energetic tension contained in its realisation. This gives rise to different layers, densities and constant back and forth movements in the handling of the materials, which transport different temporalities (such as the act of the interview, the creation of the transcripts as memory-writing and memory-in-motion, the editing and transformation of the transcripts in the studio and their physical translation; as well as the different temporalities of the narrative itself).

*The level of the bodies:* The bodies involved in the process are subjects and objects of research at the same moment in which processing, understanding and negotiation take place directly in the body. Moments of embodiment of articulations in the interviews in the sense of filtering, focusing, imagining movement, body images, body and movement descriptions, practices, impulses for action, materialities as well as presences and absences of memory, history/histories, bodies and spaces.

*The level of space:* as an action space and archaeological excavation field, from which moments of arranging and dis-arranging arise; strategies of mapping in order to spatialise memories, experiences and thus performative knowledge and to create a reference system; duplications and deletions of places and the situations described in the oral history transcripts through their establishment in the studio space by means of objects, drawings, physical figurations.

The material and the processing of the material also become a record of time. We dedicated it to the exploration of situational, art-orientated, multi-sensory, spatial, audiovisual working methods and practices, through which forms of remembering could be examined more closely, but at the same time ideas about time, space, history and memory were unsettled. From this, not so much a re-performance as possible versions and options of movements were produced – in other words, a “danced possibility” (Franko 2011: 328), as Mark Franko describes it in the context of dance scores. As a draft and trace of the interviewed dancer-choreographers, the *transcripts as scores* thus repeatedly create new contexts of meaning, whereby a specific mediality of performative knowledge can be approached. In addition, this form of examination also contains the temporal dimension of the renewed circulation of the stories: accordingly, an exposure of the transcripts to artistic-research processes that are characterised by coincidences, impulses, distortions and (re-)discoveries (cf. Borgdorff 2013). It is only through the dancers’ investigations in *Performing the Memories* that new paths of memory emerge: associations between the various practices and experiences are spun, movements that appear in the interviews are recorded and observations are incorporated. In this way, the explorative movements and memory processes in the interviews can be taken up in an artistic process, decisions in the process of passing on stories can be revealed and fragments of history, fragments of memory and shared experiences can be traced.

Our format was based on an exploration of how oral histories can be used to create other, particularly embodied and artistic-research approaches to the memories of dancer-choreographers. With the help of the various translation steps – in the act of the interview, its transcription and conversion into the medium of the score – the format reflected its structure on two levels: the interweaving of the different spaces and temporalities of the collected stories and the medium of the dancer’s body in (p) re-enactment. Instead of subordinating the collected stories to a linear understanding of time the relationality of memories was demonstrated and the function of the score between the different spaces and temporalities was analysed – and unfolded its function between ‘documentation, mediation and creation’ the dialogic and entangling elements of this knowledge transfer.



Fig. 2. *Performing the Memories* at the Centre for Contemporary Dance (CCD), University of Music and Dance Cologne, January 2022. © Miriam Althammer.



The result is social and material interventions that are always unfinished in terms of their temporal and spatial limitations and therefore refer to a larger context: as a dialogue between material and imagination, as the withdrawal and inclusion of bodies and as artistic acts that interweave and network action, questioning and assertion, that break through routines in dealing with notated or documented performative knowledge and whose aim is to enable experiences by tracking down the vitality and (un)availability of the material and to connect these directly to the body. Embedded in socio-political contexts, they call for reflection – on which voices are gathered in the space, how the hidden/unspoken is made visible and invisible, from which perspectives it is approached, and which power relations arise or can be undermined in practice with the material as a (self-reflexive) critique of Western gaze. At the same time, the interventions in their temporality serve as free spaces for the unforeseeable; they are interventions that in our case – in working with the oral histories – intervene, disturb, rupture and activate our imagination precisely in this provocation.

Changing between means and obstacles in the confrontation with the stories of the dancer-choreographers, the transcripts unfold their transformative effect as scores beyond the usual working methods and open up spaces in time. They unsettle our ideas of time, space, history and memory. As forms of dance scores, the *transcripts as scores* reflect the incompleteness of the interventions and vice versa. In the constellation of these heterogeneous materialities of bodies and archival sources, the perception of a dancer's body and its performative knowledge and its relationship to the political and social levels of these stories. The question of how oral histories can contribute to processes of mediation and knowledge transfer – and thereby enable new forms of solidarity with previously marginalised or unheard narratives from a movement-oriented perspective – constitutes a central concern of this investigation. In this context, strategies of (p)re-enactment did not serve the re-appropriation of historical events, but rather the expansion of and critical reference to articulated (performative) knowledge.

My oral history-based research demonstrates how contemporary dance histories can be reconceptualised through embodied knowledge and performative memory practices. The interviewed dancer-choreographers are given a voice particularly in their agency as authors of these stories. Their experiences and reflections form an essential part of my historiographical approach to the circulation processes of dance knowledge since the late 1980s. By positioning them in their agency and their experiences as active contributions to European dance narratives, the study destabilises dominant Western historiographical frameworks. The transformation of interview transcripts into dance scores and their reactivation through (p)re-enactments reveals a potential for dance historiography that is fluid, multidirectional, and grounded in relational processes and exemplifies how archives can be reconceived – not as static repositories, but as living spaces of encounter, imagination, and unfinished futures.

As a researcher situated within academic and artistic institutions, I critically examine my own positionality and methodological decisions, acknowledging the asymmetries of access, representation, and authorship. The archive materials of Tanzquartier Wien, while enabling transnational exchange, also exposes the limitations of institutional selection and canon formation. Thus, my research becomes a gesture of institutional critique – seeking to destabilise dominant frameworks and create space for previously marginalised or unarticulated stories. In this way, *Performing the Memories* opens up not only new spaces of remembrance but also of speculative foresight – where movement, memory, and materiality intersect to reframe (Western) archive as a living, moving body of knowledge.

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