

RE-ACTING AS A METHOD FOR RECOMPOSING A CHOREOGRAPHY

A practice as research project on the early works of Pola Nireńska (1929 – 1935).

www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

“What does it mean, to reconstruct a dance?” – that was Martin Nachbar’s question in his text entitled *Training Remembering*¹. The sentence become the starting point for the project *Pola Nireńska – Recomposition*, produced in 2015 with support from the Polish Institute of Music and Dance. In the frame of a ‘practice as research’ project, I developed a method of re-acting as a way of recomposing the choreography based on seven pictures, a few sentences and other clues which I traced back to Mary Wigman. The research covered the works of Pola Nireńska staged between 1930 – 1939, and resulted in the stage choreography *Cry Over*, which constitutes my artistic re-action to the 1933 work *Cry* by Pola Nireńska.

Choreographic re-acting clearly corresponds with the term ‘discourse’ – that is, a kind of discussion, but one undertaken in a certain way. Discourse is a term used widely in social sciences to describe the actions of groups to negotiate and determine their respective positions. In terms of fine arts, the term ‘artistic response’ is more commonly used. A painter, sculptor or photographer may respond to someone else’s work with his or her own creation. I began my research with the concept of reconstruction as described by Maaïke Bleeker², considering empirical options recognized in the theory and practice of performance art, fine art and music. My first links to the field of reconstruction came in the form of *Les Sylphides* by Nicole Beutler, as well as Mary Wigman’s works as performed by Fábian Barby³. There may be several different approaches to reconstruction, depending on the availability of the original material. When the complete choreographic score is available, reconstruction focuses on remaking the original piece. This kind of repetition is to happen with *Tetralogy of Holocaust* by Pola Nireńska, of which the copyrights are owned by Dr. Rima Faber. Kurt Jooss’s *Green Table* is one well-known case where the copyright owners protect the authenticity of the whole creation, including the cast and lighting design. The International *Chopin Piano Competition*⁴ in Warsaw is a similar situation, where performances are assessed in relation to the original. One well-known example from the field of rock music is Iggy Pop’s song *The Passenger*, covered by *Siouxsie and the Banshees* in 1987 for their all-cover album *Through the Looking*

¹ Nachbar, Martin, *Training Remembering*, “Dance Research Journal” 2012 Vol. 44(2), s. 3–12.

² Prof. Dr. Maaïke Bleeker, Department of Media and Culture Studies – Media and Performative Studies, Institute for Cultural Inquiry (ICON).

³Bleeker, Maaïke, (Un) *Covering Artistic Thought Unfolding*, Congress of Research in Dance 2012, s. 14.

⁴ The International Chopin Piano Competition, often referred to as the Chopin Competition, is a piano competition held in Warsaw, Poland. It was initiated in 1927 and has been held every five years since 1955. It is one of few competitions devoted entirely to the works of a single composer.

Glass.⁵ In film, this is called a 'remake,' referring to the telling of the same story with updated language and technology. For example, Alfred Hitchcock remade his 1934 black-and-white *The Man Who Knew Too Much* in colour in 1956.

Reconstruction takes a different form when only a portion of the original work is available. This situation is well known in music, when only the samples of the score have survived through history. This kind of reconstruction is named a recomposition. The recreation of ancient music even involves the reconstruction of ancient instruments and research into their acoustic characteristics. One of the examples of such practice is recomposition of ancient Greek songs by Maciej Rychły, a former musician at the Gardziennice Theatre in Poland.⁶



Reconstruction of paintings in the Ancient Pompeii, Italy. April 2015. Photo credit I. Wojnicka

These examples of various reconstruction efforts are embodied by the reconstruction process at the Museum of Ancient Pompeii. To reconstruct one original painting, a new technology was developed and a group of artists hired. Their work is shown in the picture above. Inspired by this image, and with limited information available, I began to develop an understanding of my own role in reconstructing the early works of Nireńska from seven pictures, one essay and a few letters received from Dr. Rima Faber, the primary witness of Pola Nireńska over the last decade of her life. But how could I reconstruct a dance when the actual body of

⁵ "The Passenger" is a song by Iggy Pop and Ricky Gardiner, recorded and released by Iggy Pop on the *Lust for Life* album in 1977. The lyrics, allegedly written by Iggy Pop while aboard Berlin's S-Bahn, have been interpreted as embodying the nomadic spirit of the punk outcast. Guitarist Ricky Gardiner composed the music. The song is loosely based on a poem by Jim Morrison. To date it has been covered almost 30 times. The cover by *Siouxsie and the Banshees* peaked at number 41 in the UK singles chart.

⁶ The Gardzienice Centre for Theatre Practices was founded in 1977 by [Włodzimierz Staniewski](#), and formally registered in 1978. The name comes from the village where the theatre is located. The group gained international critical acclaim, and is classified as an [experimental](#) anthropological theater.

choreographic work has been lost? To deal with this, I had to construct a kind of inter-dependent methodology for the work. To translate the reconstruction of the Pompeian image into the field of dance, I would have to use modern tools create a piece responding to the remnants of the lost work. I received meaningful practical support from my collaborator, prof. Roman Woźniak, who shared with a number of practical solutions as applied to fine arts. The resulting creation was only possible using means available at the particular moment; in other words, no creation is possible when an artist wishes to use tools not available to her or him at a certain time and place. The field of fine arts combines imaginative talent with competence in investigating and employing the most economic and available tools. In keeping with such reasoning, I made a summary of information available to me for my research. Using my previous experience with choreographic response, which was the subject of my practical PhD from Chopin University in Poland, I developed a choreographic re-action. While a choreographic response is possible when the original is available, re-acting involves analysis of one's own knowledge, associations, skills and creativity. Not knowing the style of Pola Nireńska dance and body when she was 25, I had to react to the information available about her past. My artistic response constituted an action provided by choreographic means.

The limited resources led me to widen the research perspective. Starting with the question of dance style, I researched the work of Mary Wigman. Her school in Dresden, 'just around the corner' from Warsaw, must have been quite an attractive opportunity for Pola. Within three years, she graduated, become one of Wigman's dancers, and started staging her own solos. From my understanding, she must have embodied Wigman's dance style well, to have used it as such. This was confirmed by Rima Faber's description of Pola's methods. Lacking the original material to which to respond, working from Wigman's material was the most reasonable choice. I chose to look for works contemporary to *Ausdruckstanz*. Preston-Dunlop⁷ described the way in which Wigman developed *Ausdruckstanz*⁸, the choreography of which was based on a combination the contradictory rhythmic patterns, whereby half of the body was moving to a different rhythm than the another half. One single such phrase was the starting point for developing a sequence. With daily rehearsals, it became a combination, which grew day-by-day into an *étude*. According Rima Faber, Pola Nireńska also worked this way. Wigman composed *études* into stage performances, and so did Nireńska, as best exemplified by the *Tetralogy of Holocaust*, in which she assembled four existing dance pieces into one stage performance. Following from this, Nireńska progressed in her approach to creation, as influenced by German Modern Tanz, throughout her life. However, only the first

⁷ Preston-Dunlop, V., Sanchez-Colberg, A., *Dance and The Performative*, Verve Publishing 2010, London

⁸ Presentation of *Inner Suspension* method by Susanne Linke. The video documentation I've produced is available at <https://vimeo.com/178315970> More of Susanne Linke in the reference no19.

phase of her career is a subject of this research. Sometimes, for the sake of artistic creation, we must examine such works from a modern perspective. In creating the choreography inspired by Pola and her work, I considered four dimensions of our lives, including our perceptions of reality within the perspective of the flow of time. As such, my attitude toward her work stemmed from my internal interpretation of reality and from my favourite aspects of artistic experiments with time. Inspired by the concept of time, I started composing choreographic actions.

Resources



Pola Nireńska, born in 1910 in Warsaw, was one of the three Polish dancers⁹, who graduated from Mary Wigman's three year dance programme, and who performed with Wigman's group in their third tour of the United States in 1932. Because of her Jewish origin, she had to leave Germany and was not able to return to Warsaw. She moved to London, and finally continued her life and work in Washington, DC. Her life was indelibly marked by the trauma of the Holocaust, in which she lost her entire family. She never returned to her hometown of Warsaw. Her parents and a brother, who had decided to emigrate to Israel, disappeared. The titles of her solos

become very significant to me: *Cry* staged in Warsaw in 1933 and *Shout*¹⁰ staged later in Washington. Her most important and most spectacular stage work was entitled *Tetralogy of Holocaust*¹¹. She committed suicide in 1990 in the age of 81 by jumping from the window of her Washington apartment.

⁹ The other dancers, who accomplished the Wigman's training were Irena Prusicka and Tadjanna Wysocka. In Alicja Iwańska *Twórczość choreograficzna Poli Nireńskiej na tle niemieckiego tańca ekspresjonistycznego lat trzydziestych XX wieku. Analiza*. Manuscript.

¹⁰ *Shout* premiered 1987 in Washington, DC.

¹¹ Faber, Rima, Ph.D: *Pola Nirenska: A Pioneer of Modern Dance in Washington, DC*, <http://polanirenska.blogspot.com/p/her-story.html>



My choreographic research was based on her pre-World War II works. The only available visual material are seven photographs of Pola Nireńska from the 1930's, one of which is included above.¹² Other materials include drawings of Mary Wigman and pictures of her in various dance poses¹³, as well as a one-minute sequence of Kurt Jooss' outdoor movement choir in Tanzbühne Laban¹⁴. One of the inspirations was the Tilly Losch's two-minute 1929 film *Tanz der Hände*, presented at the exhibition I attended in Berlin in Autumn, 2015¹⁵. The image to the left represents promotional material for the exhibition, with the face of the dancer. In the short film, Tilly wore a long, black dress, and her hair was short and curly, surrounding the oval of the face. She danced with her hands and arms sitting on the box.

Her body was moving constantly in free flow. According to the pictures presented at the exhibition, this kind of image was the image of beauty in those days. Pola Nireńska would definitely have appeared this way on stage.¹⁶ As concerns the empirical methodology I developed, I published all the evidence I collected for public use. They are available on the blog dedicated to the Pola Nireńska¹⁷ and show my path in following the steps of Pola before World War II.

Tools

The main tool chosen for the project was the reconstruction method recently developed in Germany by Susan Linke, Thomas Kempe and others, who investigated works of the pioneers of Modern Dance in Germany, Israel and Japan. All of the researchers struggled with the lack of visual materials. Each of them searched for parallel methods, paths, and ways in which Ausdruckstanz might have been performed by individual artists. According to the writings of Preston-Dunlop, Mary Wigman's work method involved continuous development of her dance style through the years. In practice, that means that there were movement phrases and rules of applying them in all her works. Following this way of thinking, the movement she taught at her school was embodied by her students. As the body is the main instrument in creating a dance style, and it needs many years of daily training to embody a particular style, I made an assumption regarding the style of early works of Pola Nireńska. Working with

¹² The picture of Pola Nireńska, 1933, by Zygmunt Szajer. Published on www.audiovis.nac.gov.pl

¹³ Pictures of Mary Wigman taken from books available in the catalog at Codarts Mediateek in 2010

¹⁴ Available at www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

¹⁵ *Tanz der Hände. Tilly Losch und Hedy Pfundmayr in Fotografien 1920-1935*. Das Verbogene Museum in Berlin. Dokumentation der Kunst von Frauen. Opening 9.09.2015.

¹⁶ More images taken during the exhibition are available on the www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

¹⁷ Available at resources at a website of the project www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

this particular style, she might have been practicing a certain way of moving, which she continued and developed throughout her dance career. In order to recognize its characteristics and dominant features, this research should return to the roots of the style. Studying 4 years of Laban Movement Analysis with Antja Kennedy in Eurolab, Berlin and earlier studies of Laban Based Modern Dance¹⁸ for two and a half years with Joan van der Mast in Codarts, Rotterdam gave me a decent technical background to handle the task of recomposition. To continue, I participated in the Kirsten Seeligmüller's¹⁹ workshop at Dock 11 in Berlin, as well as Susan Linke's workshop presentation at Tanzcongress in Hanover in 2016²⁰. In the meantime, I was also inspired by the Gaga workshop in Tel Aviv, as well as conversations with Dr. Liora Malka Yelin from the University of Tel Aviv, who researched Gertrud Kraus – the pioneer of Modern Dance in Israel. Also, I attended the conference entitled *POST - Ausdruckstanz in Israel, Deutschland und im Butoh* in Dock 11 Berlin²¹ Autumn 2015. During the research project, I also used the Elementarer Tanz method of Maya Lex, to which I was introduced at the Modern Tanz Conference in Cologne²². Here, I was also able to use my education in applied Sociology, where studying a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in research took more than 300 hours. The resources collected on the research blog presents rationale for my choreographic re-actions.

¹⁸ Laban Based Modern Dance is rooted in German Ausdruckstanz technique. My opinion comes from movement practice, based on comparison of Susanne Linke style to the LBMD style of teaching in Codarts. More of Codarts and connection to Laban in reference 24. Videos presenting sample classes of Ausdruckstanz by Susanne Linke and LBMD by Joan van der Mast available at www.polanirenska.blogspot.com.

¹⁹ Kirsten Seeligmüller studied Ausdruckstanz with Erika Klütz (1908) who was an assistant and dancer in the Mary Wigman group. She also worked with Harald Kreutzberg, Marianne Vogelsang and Dore Hoyer. As the base of the workshop, she used the following source: Marianne Vogelsang *Curriculum for the Institutions of Artistic Education in the German Democratic Republic*, Theater and Dance – Issue 6 – 1954. Printed as a manuscript. Published by the Ministry of Culture Main department of Artistic Education. Thoughts on New Artistic Dance Part 2. Spatial Drawings by Jochen Elske Translation: David Bloom

²⁰ Tanzcongress Hannover 2016: Presentation of Inner Suspension method by Susanne Linke. The video documentation I've produced is available at <https://vimeo.com/178315970>. *The 70-year-old choreographer Susanne Linke unites diverse experiences with the history of German dance. Prominent personalities of dance such as Mary Wigman, Dore Hoyer, Kurt Jooss, and Hans Züllig have shaped Susanne Linke's unique movement memory, from which she has developed her very own, highly structured technique. Together with fellow travelers, colleagues, students of the Folkwang University of the Arts, and dance historians, Susanne Linke is working within the frame of the research project 'Inner Suspension' on the documentation of her specific artistic approach that is to be conveyed to future generations and set in relation to contemporary concepts of art. In a lecture demonstration, a group of selected dancers under the direction of Susanne Linke will present the training model 'Inner Suspension.'* Tanzcongress Program Guide, http://www.tanzkongress.de/files/tk16_programmheft.pdf (1.07.16) page 18. Sample recordings by author are available at www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

²¹ http://www.dock11-berlin.de/index.php/cat/1/id/p488_POST--Ausdruckstanz-in-Israel--Deutschland-und-im-Butoh.html

²² Maya Lex (1906 - 1986) was a German dance, choreographer and teacher. She created a style named Elementarer Tanz. My first experience with the style was during the conference *Das Erbe der Tanz-Moderne im zeitgenössischen Kontext. Tanz-Labore zur Forschung in der Praxis*, 5.-7. 06. 2015 in DSHS Köln, Institut für Tanz und Bewegungskultur.

Classes by Krystyna Obermaier / Dilan Ercenk-Heimann: *Elementarer Tanz*

Re-actions



Drawings from of the original - Iwona Wojnicka

Choreographic re-acting is an artist's need or necessity to address or respond to reality. As a result, a certain choreographic statement is created – a statement which is both repeatable and able to be performed by other artists.

The drawings from the Mary Wigman's original choreographic sketches were my starting point²³. I was impressed with their precision, charm, beauty and liveliness. At first, my desire was to repeat the movement, but in rehearsing I realized that repetition would be insufficient. Missing the connection, I created a choreographic re-action of the poses presented in the sketches. In rehearsing, I recognized much of the Laban Based Modern Dance technique was involved. At that time, I was not aware of the original technique of the Mary Wigman school. I recomposed the piece, with my choreographic reactions included, based on knowledge gained in Codarts²⁴. Long after the premiere, I had a chance to watch Susan Linke²⁵ teaching the key elements of Wigman style. There was a compelling similarity to the Laban Based Modern Dance technique taught in Rotterdam and to Susan Linke's the style of Inner Suspension. The year-long physical experience with Laban Movement analysis concepts

²³ Choreographic notes from the Wigman's sketchbook of *Carmina Burana* premiered in Nationaltheater Mannheim in 1955 and *Orpheus und Eurydike* staged at Deutsche Oper Berlin in 1961. Steinbeck, Dietrich: Mary Wigmans Choreographisches Skizzenbuch 1930-1961. Edition Hentrich Berlin, 1987

²⁴ The Rotterdamsche Dansschool (Rotterdam Dance School) founded in 1931 by Corrie Hartong and the German dancer, Gertrud Leistikow, who both were the students of Rudolfa Labana. Hartong stopped teaching in 1967.

²⁵ The sample recordings from Susan Linke's unique project are available at www.polanirenska.blogspot.com

helped me to create a choreographic reaction to the pictures. Without knowledge of the stage works, but with awareness of the everyday physical practice of the dancers that time, I used it as a starting point. Embodying the style was an everyday experience for the dancers. I looked at Pola's early works from the perspective of a rehearsal room. My re-acting of the missing information, the choreographic score, was an attempt to recreate the everyday exercises of the pioneers of modern dance in Germany at that time.

The beginning of the work involved remaking these poses and trying to find the passage from one into another. However, there was still the issue of stage energy and a missing quality within it. My question was, how to make it all worth watching for the audience. Mary Wigman was famous for her high stage presence, so there must have been something to give the poses their energy. Here, I discovered that the only way was to react to them with a sense of self, awakening them through my body and personality. Adaptation of a method of artistic re-acting became the key solution for the creation of the whole piece.

Another key element which was re-acted during the creative process was the description of Pola's solo work entitled *Cry*.

The solo choreography was inspired by Lou Harrison's poem *Hatred of the Dirty Bomb*. Accompanied by the music composed of from the sounds of sirens, the dancer runs around the stage, trying to catch space with her arms. Her gestures are rough, expressive and chaotic, interspersed with fearful gestures and silent screams. She constantly runs toward the audience with her hands extended and her face frightened, making direct eye contact. The dancer rips her costume and tears her hair.

These moving sentences made us consider how to attempt the work. In creating the reaction, the other artists and I produced a meaningful work by encouraging each other to share deep personal connections, emotions, and knowledge, which provided a unique artistic contribution. Collectively following this form of resonance with the material, we composed scenes, scenography, lighting and costume design.

Developing the Performance

The full lentght performance is available online in the resources of The Polish Institute of Music and Dance.

▪ Prologue

I visited the Judische Museum designed by Liebeskind²⁶ after a long and tiring day of physical practice. It was August 2015, around 19.00. The walls were empty and white, and none was either straight, squared or vertical. All of the slanting interiors were high, white and deserted. Sloped floors made my walk uncertain, unsure and unsecure. Spaces lacked the conventions of what is considered to be convenient. One of the passages led to the tower. When the heavy door closed behind my back, I drowned in darkness, isolated from the light. My voice was returning to me from the black, endless space. My eyes become useless. My body felt dispersed. I experienced an overwhelming feeling of being buried alive in a cold hell.

Leaving the space, I already had a backache, but I still wanted to visit the third floor. But there were no lift available for visitors, so I started to climb the endlessly high stairs. The other visitors and I stopped momentarily in strange positions, puffing, sweating, and shaking our heads with distaste. Reaching the first floor was already a challenge, but the pain in my back forced me to discontinue. Within a few minutes, I felt weak, old and useless. All the dashed hopes from my whole life resurfaced. My reaction to the architectural answer to the Holocaust was physical and emotional. I could not stand being there any longer, but I immediately realized what Pola Nireńska must have felt for most of her life. Being sentenced for such a life would probably make me insane.

When I left the museum, it was already close to midnight. I dove into the green, rainy summer night. Berlin smelled of sweet flowers and wet leaves. Someone in the street came back twice to direct me the right way to the U-Bahn. I called my mother and she was laughing telling me stories of her day on Polish-German family holidays in Bad-Salzflun. But what if I had no one to call? What if the friendly person in the street had suddenly hit me? What if everything I loved and enjoyed disappeared instantly, leaving me in a cold hell without a way to escape? Is this what Pola felt, when her world violently disintegrated? Did anyone understand her? Why did she call her works Cry and Scream? Did she feel what was going to occur? Was it a cry for understanding? Did anyone hear it? How could anyone respond from Warsaw, her hometown, while it was being ruined and its people murdered. There was no one calling. Part of her died with this world, and she must have been waking up each morning half-alive. Later, the totalitarian regime precluded any possibility of contact between West and East. No email, no Skype, no mobile phones were available at that time. Just empty silence and the permanent state of loss and despair.

The research was rich with compassion. I shared my findings with the artists involved in the process. There was information on the work and life of Pola Nireńska. I studied for four years in Germany, just like Pola. She must have enjoyed movement choir dance practices, outdoor practices, and a life devoted to dance. She must have liked the sound of the language and the people speaking it. She was young, joyful and happy with her life. But everything was about to be turned upside-down. At that time, she did not know the future. But I knew, and in the performance, I wanted to connect to both the past and the future. I developed 20 minutes of the choreography in response to Pola Nireńska's life, from the perspective of what I knew of the places where she spent time. We have chosen to follow the joy she might have

²⁶ The concept *disappearance as disequilibrium* by deconstructionist architect Daniel Liebeskind is also mentioned in Preston-Dunlop, V., Sanchez-Colberg, A., *Dance and The Performative*, Verve Publishing 2010, London on page 88.

experienced in practicing the Freie Tanz at daily rehearsals. Following the research, emotions, and artistic discourse within the group helped me make my re-acting more explicit. It resulted in the choreography titled Cry Over. The description below is the promotional material used for publicity. The following is the review of particular scenes, including both the inspirations and methods of work in creating choreography.

CRY OVER

*Licht über den Häusern hin
Ein Traumring schnell vorbei
Ein wenig Zauberei
Ein kleines Spiel
Ein Sommerabend
Luft vibrierte
Wenn ich nicht will, ich will nicht
Wenn ich nicht will, ich will nicht
Hört ihr?*²⁷

This stage work is the artistic answer to the early works of Pola Nireńska, the Polish dancer and choreographer of Jewish origin who began her career in Mary Wigman's group in the 1930's. During the Dance Congress in 1934 in Vienna, she was awarded for her choreography entitled Cry. Despite the success, the solo Pola Nireńska's solo career was a continuous, lonely and fearful escape from the experience of Nazi persecution.

The main inspiration for this choreography comes from images of the artist's description of Cry. The result is a stage performance composed of fragmented information, traces and associations connected to the works of the dancer. The choreographic traces led us back to the methods developed by Mary Wigman and German Ausdruckstanz. Each dance étude was developed by improvising on a single element. Over the course of our daily rehearsals, new elements were added to create full choreographic sentences, paragraphs and chapters. Ausdruckstanz was the tool Pola used to face the traumas of war, offering her the recuperation of catharsis. For us, she became the inspiration to create this work.

This choreographic Practice as Research project was supported by the Polish Institute of Music and Dance.

Choreography and Dance: Iwona Wojnicka, Gosia Gajdemska
Music Compositions and Dance: India Czajkowska
Dramaturg and Lighting Director: Roman Woźniak
Sound realization: Rafał Smoliński
Graphic design: Beata Pofelska
Stylization: Roman Woźniak, Katarzyna Rysiak
Manager: Joanna Stasina
Production: Art Collective Format Zero

Premiere 15th of June 2016
Warsaw

²⁷ *Light on the back houses
A dream ring over quickly
A little magic
A little game
A summer evening
air vibrates*

*If I do not want, I do not want
If I do not want, I do not want
Can you hear?*

The passage of the unknown poem presented in 1932 by Deutsche Rundfunk, performed by Mary Wigman, *Die Akte Wigman. Eine Dokumentation der Mary Wigman-Schule-Dresden 1920-1942*. CD.

- **Walking away** (0 – 4.14 minutes)

The performance begins with an étude inspired by Maya Lex's *Elementarer Tanz*, with a rotation of the right hip joint. This was my re-enactment of the notion of rehearsals, based on early *Ausdrucktanz* physical practices²⁸. The rotation is successively developed into a whole sequence of movements, which include a study of different steps, occasionally quoting one pose from the picture of Pola. The chosen diagonal path of the travelling stage gives the audience the perspective of an opened picture, with the impression of the image extending outside of the frame, as in the painting *Railroad Train* by Edward Hopper. In it, the audience can see running and escaping, but the motives for such actions are outside of the picture. Here, the most important scenographical element is a podium, which is a quotation from Nireńska's early works. However, the podium we used was inspired with the Daniel Liebeskind's architecture of the Jewish Museum in Berlin. The podium is white and sloping, standing in the corner of the stage. Sculpted by Roman Woźniak, the podium changes the tension of the space, playing both the role of both support and obstacle. It is directly associated with *Podiumtanz*²⁹. After playing with forward and backward steps, I finally finish with one foot on the podium.

- **Moths** (4.50 – 5.36 minutes)

The light on me fades, and audience can see the movement choir emerging from the darkness. This scene was a response to the minute-long *Laban Tanzbühne* film, posted on Facebook by Thomas Kempe. The exact movement counts 5 and 6, but the change of space and lighting made it unreal and ominous, like the memory of a bad dream.

- **Nocturn** (5.50 – 10.58)

The light fades and again I appear standing with one foot on the white podium. The Nocturn of India Czajkowska starts and I dance the choreography developed precisely for the slanting surface of the object. I use phrasing and rhythm, sometimes starting quickly and continuing the phrase slowly, sometimes the opposite. In this choreography, I am inspired by the idea of sailing the ocean to the foreign land.

- **The Choir** (11.02 – 12.41 minutes)

The previous choreography suddenly turns in a playful mode, which is the start of the trio inspired by *Laban Tanzbühne*, where joyful young women dance the A scale outdoors. Following the architectural inspiration of Liebeskind, the choir occasionally steps on the

²⁹ *Podiumtanz* is the form of dance performed outside of the theatre space, i.e. in an art gallery or industrial space, and is most often a group performance. The stage is a podium created in the space, the venue of the audience. The lighting is static. In Boehme, F., *Vorstellung und Erlebnis in Tanz*, Wissenschaftliches Antiquariat Hans Junker. Wien 1930.

podium. The inconvenience of the slanting surface is hidden within the steps accompanied by elongated, upward-reaching gestures. The inspiration and joy of the *Inner Suspension* technique of Susan Linke³⁰ were paramount here. The group disappears in the darkness, leaving the soloist alone on stage in a pose expressing farewell.

- **Bloch** (12.51 – 15.54 minutes)

The following is a solo based on a reconstruction of the drawings of the poses described on page 7. For rehearsing, it was accompanied by Ernest Bloch's *Concerto Grosso*, the most favourite piece of Nireńska. In the performance, the original musical response is composed by Michal Talma-Stutt. The main issue of this choreographic piece was the question of how to reconstruct a dance out of poses. I developed the connections between them, and then looped it backwards. Each time, a different phrasing is applied with a variety of timings, flows and spaces. From my knowledge, this piece might be the closest to the original choreographic style used by Nireńska from the beginning of her career until 1939, which was the aim of the research.

- **Duet** (16.00 – 18.54 minutes)

The duet is the re-action of the scale A choreography of Rudolf Laban³¹, which was surely one of the main inspirations for Wigman's movement style. I assumed that Nireńska was at that time under influence of the Wigman school, and that she might have developed the choreography with this particular scale. However, this also represents also re-action of the description of Nireńska choreography *Shout*, where at the end, she was pulling the hair out of her head.

- **Wings** (19.20 – 26.53 minutes)

The following composition is inspired by the practice of *Erementarer Tanz*, which is a movement study of the shoulder blades. Accompanied by the music of Ernest Bloch, it forms my choreographic re-action of Pola's emigration. In the score, I am not only addressing the ability to move to other places, meet other people, and conquer the world, but also the reality of being detached and estranged, abandoned and forcefully split from one's homeland. The choreographic score develops into a whole composition, where I used the study of gestures by Michale Angelo from the Sykstin Cathedral combined with the study of hand gestures taught by Kirsten Seeligmüller³². Apart from studying wings, I used the image of writing and sending letters to follow the rise and fall of Pola's life, eventually bringing my re-

³¹ The system of movement scales created by Rudolf Laban is based on Platonic solids. The A Scal is composed of 12 points representing the structure of icosahedron drawn into the human body kinesphere. The practice of movement scales, likeley in musical practice, is a technical base for developement of composition. In this particular case, the choreographical ones.

enactment into the her repetitive depressive periods. The last part of the choreography involves climbing the podium, accompanied with the song *Alte Kasze* (Old Berlin) arranged by the composer India Czakowska. The song ends with a still position on the edge of the podium. The whole choreographic composition is precisely composed with space and lighting design, inspired by the works of Daniel Liebeskind.

- **Mermaid** (29.40 – 37.17 minutes)

The last choreography is more of a strict theatre composition. Inspired by the beauty of a poem recorded in 1933 by Mary Wigman for Deutsche Rundfunk, we developed a scene based on its adaptation. Our aim was to emphasise the beauty of the spoken language, the mysticism of the poem and the magical arrangement of the production from 1933. Following our reading, understanding and reflection, we developed a scene in which the performer, movement, space and sound³³ are connected. In terms of movement, we used one phrase, which was performed with slowly increasing rhythm and weight. The collective imagination of the artists involved in the process resulted in a scene where magic, charm and beauty, representing the time of the Weimar Republic³⁴, slowly morph into the home of terror and massive violence.

Summary

Dance reconstruction is still in the phase of experimentation and exploration. It evokes discussions of different attempts to deal with the nature of choreography. The most crucial is the issue of the artistic texture of this form of creation, which disappears with the life of a performer. Reconstruction of dance includes at least several layers of possible effort. It is most convenient when the Laban notation of the work is available, accompanied by competent directors who know precisely the quality, dynamics and special orientation of each particular phrase. However, this is only the case for the most well-known pieces by renowned companies. Unfortunately, this is not in the case for the pioneers of Modern Dance in Germany. The most likely obstacles to the preservation of choreographic material are its low recognition on the repertoire stage level and constant financial struggles, as teaching was always more secure than performing.³⁵ However, the technology of the day also made preservation impossible. The availability and cost of the film recording of that time made it a serious issue for production budgets. The Nazi Regime did not accept the *Freier Tanz* movement, which resulted in the closure of dance schools, restrictions on dancers of Jewish origin, and finally in the destruction of all documentation. It is the reason why German

³³ Preston-Dunlop, V., Sanchez-Colberg, A., *Dance and The Performative*, Verve Publishing 2010, London

³⁴ Toepfer, K., *Empire of Ecstasy. Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910–1935*. University of California Press. Berkeley.Los Angeles.Oxford, 1997.

³⁵ Ibidem

archives do not offer much in terms of such research. However, the memory and practice of contemporary dance practices in Germany offer, in case of this choreological study, more answers. The chosen perspective of the rehearsal room let us capture the unique atmosphere of dance education in Germany – the unspoken quality that lies somewhere between spirit of the culture, language and bodily affirmation. Dealing with theories of reconstruction in performative arts together with the limited available resources on the pre-war work of Pola Nireńska resulted in the development of re-acting as a method of recomposition in dance. Such an attempt necessitated both a review of the existing sources and a modern perspective and capacities to deal with the issue of recomposition. As an outcome, we created a stage work which had the quality of an artistic response to the work of the artist from the past. It does not reconstruct the existing dance, but gives an idea of how to respond to the choreography with the tools available to the contemporary artist. The work involved practices associated with fine arts in their academic perspective, which may be an important voice in bringing dance reconstruction to a scientific level.

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