Returning, once again, to the matter of dance [and] theory:

In the course of my preparations for this paper the sketches, theses and examples concerning dance and the theory of dance soon began to mount up. The complicated and manifold links between dance and as/in/through/with/against theory soon manifest themselves in a chaos of ‘links,’ which of course is a ‘liaison dangereuse,’ at least for one who intends to give a reasonably cogent talk about this very ‘liaison.’ Which theories? And what relation to dance does one have in mind? What attractions or repulsions between a theory and a praxis of dancing manifest themselves, and how can this changing relationship be viewed? Is one to despair and adopt a skeptical position, like the 18th century natural philosopher Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, who once wrote about a new theory in psychology that it was about as relevant as the well-known theory “in physics [...] that attributed the Northern lights to the reflected gleam of herrings?” (Promies 1968: 292, translation: Brandstetter).

And what dance? What concept of dance? Contemporary dance has generated an immense variety of references to theories: body theories, philosophical theories, political theories. Anyone who thinks about it will soon find plenty of examples: William Forsythe in *Artifact* (1984), for example, has worked with post-structuralist linguistic and textual theories; Jérôme Bel has drawn upon Roland Barthes’ body theory and Guy Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* (*Picht Kluchar & myself*, 2005); the Hamburg-based LIGNA Group, taking its cue from Walter Benjamin’s theory of media (for instance in: *Das Unbewusste der Sterne*, 2008¹), weaves political theories into its works; and the Hamburg/Berlin based collective She She Pop has adopted – among other things – Judith Butler’s theorems of gender and queer theory. Many examples could be added to this list. Equally important, however, is the excellent work done on dance by those institutions and practitioners that follow in the tradition of works on the history of dance, whether ballet companies or dance theatres like those of Pina Bausch. The knowledge of ballet masters and choreologists is also theory-based, drawing both on an oral tradition of knowledge of the physical aspects of dance and on the historical research by those engaged in dance studies.

¹ See the documentation: LIGNA (2009).
But does this mean, some will ask, that we have already reached the field of theory or that we never left it? Where are the generalizing, analytical, reflexive dimensions which distinguish a theory of art in the narrower sense? And in what way, others will ask, would one associate dancing, not in the sense of a staged performance, but as a kind of movement in other social contexts, intermingled with theories and discourses?

Once again my attempts to clear the thickets of associations have come to a standstill. It seems to be difficult to find a balance. Wherever one tries to take a balanced view from, a dis/balance is generated. An emphasis on dance theories dealing with the making of dances and choreographies, causes an imbalance in relation to those theories which are used – by scholars of dance, for example – in the analytical and hermeneutic consideration of the aesthetic or political significance of a dance or dance piece. Do we not see here (once again) in these apparently unavoidable dis/balances the gap between praxis and theory: that praxis which, as action, as active intervention in reality, Aristotle opposed to the theoretical, purely cerebral way of observing and explaining reality in such a dis/balanced way as to place the theoretical mode of existing, the “vita contemplativa,” over the practical one, the “vita activa” (cf. Arendt 1958)? The question would then be: what action? And is it not so that new, and different “negotiations,” as Stephen Greenblatt (1988) calls them, are being conducted between theory and practice at this very moment? Such as those that see – in the rethinking of approaches from Hannah Arendt’s political theory in “The human condition” (1958; cf. Virno 1996) – action in observation (e.g. that of the active spectator, cf. Rancière 2007) as praxes of theory; and on the other hand such negotiations as see observation and reflection in the action of the practitioner/dancer as praxeology, i.e. as theoretically informed praxis. A chiasmus like that would create a balance. But how does this unsteady balance, at closer or further inspection, maintain itself in movement? Is it not a rhetorical artifice, an act of “ponderation” – to borrow a term from the tight-rope walkers – and the next step falls ineluctably out of balance for a moment? So what are we to do? Wait/observe? Or act/dance? In Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot (1964 [1952]) there is a scene that occurred to me as I was trying to get out of the trap of my ‘ponderation.’ Pozzo wants to put on an act for Vladimir and Estragon in order to dispel their boredom. His servant and porter Lucky, on a leash, like a dog – or like a dancing bear – is to perform something. Pozzo asks Vladimir and Estragon: “What do you prefer? Shall we have him dance [...] or think?” (ibid: 39). Vladimir and Estragon quarrel over whether Lucky should dance first or think first. They agree that “he could dance first and think afterwards,” which, as Pozzo comments, is “the natural order” (ibid). “Lucky puts down hat and basket,” as the stage direction says, and “dances. He stops” (ibid). When Estragon asks: “Is that all?” (ibid) Lucky at Pozzo’s command, “repeats the same movements, stops” (ibid) “Estragon: Pooh! I’d do as well myself (He imitates Lucky, almost falls.) With a little practice” (ibid: 40).

Lucky’s simple movements, mechanically repeated, nevertheless make Estragon, when he imitates the dance, lose his balance; he “almost falls” (ibid). Lucky’s performance of thinking also has such an effect: his interminable, arhythmic and mechanical speech, reeled off as a “monotone lecture” (Beckett 1976 [1952]: 46, translation: Brandstetter) without full stops or commas, strings together theoretical and scientific theorems as though they were theatrical properties; constantly interrupted by hesitations, stutters: this too a mechanism that is losing its balance until we are left with the “[s]ilence of Lucky. He falls.” (Beckett 1964 [1952]: 44) Thinking and dancing, dancing and thinking appear alternately; a ‘ballot mécanique’ driven off balance to the point of collapse. A scene which also, inexorably, uncovers a power mechanism which forms as it were the ‘yoke’ (rope) between thinking and dancing, between theory and dance movement: namely in the master-servant relationship between Pozzo and Lucky; and in the relationship between performer and spectator (in which the spectators are divided into an immobile part, Vladimir, and a mobile part, Estragon). The observer whom the transition from observing to praxis – an imitation of movement – throws off his balance, out of his contemplation: the chiasm of theory in praxis, praxis in theory is in itself constantly deferred. In and out of balance.

Let us go back again, or further on, as the attempt at exploring the possible negotiations between theory and practice of dance resembles the Echternach Spring Procession (two steps forward, one step back):

‘Theoria,’ from the Greek in the meaning of view, investigation, and the concept of ‘theatron,’ i.e. ‘room for viewing,’ suggest (by virtue of this etymological affinity) a proximity between theory and a ‘showing,’ self-showing praxis. Seen in this light, the actions and motions of dance and performance would be, (as with theatre and music) incorporated in such a frame of reference. What is decisive here – as a meta-figuration, so to speak – are the relevant laws, forms and power structures that make up this framework – for example the manner of dancing/showing the dancer-spectator constellation (as the scene from Waiting for Godot demonstrates).

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2 Arendt draws on these basic terms of Aristotelian Philosophy.
3 Although they have not yet been introduced to the discourse on ‘theory and practice’ I use the concepts ‘praxes of theory’ (which is the title of a project of dance and theatre studies at the Freie Universität Berlin in cooperation with the Richard and Mary L Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry at the University of Chicago) and ‘praxeology’ in order to make it clear that these complex interlockings are not just forms of transfer of applied theory. It is more of a reflexive breach, a ‘kinetic epoch’ that has to be imaged in both directions in this process.
4 The term ‘ponderation’ is used in the double sense of equilibrium, keeping balance and the reflexive state of the mind.

5 Pozzo explains that Lucky ‘used to dance the farandole, the fling, the brawl, the jig, the fandango, and even the hornpipe. [...] Now that’s the best he can do.’ (Beckett 1964 [1952]: 40)
It must be clear by now that a reliable, stable meta-position for a systematic view of the relationship between dance, theory and praxis cannot be achieved (and may not even be desirable). A dis/balance, a loss of control, is always looming on the horizon. So why not implicate movement in the viewing process? It will only involve a few changes in position (at the risk of slipping).

But first allow me to make a brief excursion into the history of theories of dance; proceeding from the hypothesis that dance has always – in practice – incorporated theory/theories. The body concepts of a culture, the traditions of representing movements, the joy of movement, the desire and the disciplines that deal with them (which operate in theories and discourses), become performative; are incorporated in different historical, aesthetic forms of dance. As Paul Valéry aptly put it: “What clearer expression of dancing do you want than dancing itself?” (1956 [1923]: 44)

According to a conception of the relationship between dance and theory – which, though still relevant today, has undergone several versions in the history of dance – theory is implicit in dance and dancing. The balance of a relation between these two aspects – dance theory and dance practice – is thus relegated to the actions of dancing and choreographing. Thus a praxeology of dance in the sense mentioned above does not mean an understanding of dance as ‘applied theory,’ there is no ‘utilisation’ or illustration of theorems. It refers rather to what might be called an extended concept of dance, which does not confine the practice, the action or, yes, the ‘work’ of dancing to the performance of a dance, but sees it as a dynamic process. By the nature of things the historical concepts of such a praxeological understanding of dance are subject – in the context of art – to great social and political changes. A comparative study of such concepts in, say, the 18th, 19th and 20th/21st centuries would have to pursue the change of paradigm of such involvements of theory in dance, for example, on the basis of criteria that would shed light on the relevant understanding of bodily movement, gender and space as well as the representational contexts and models of the ‘order of knowledge’ (cf. Foucault 2004 [1966]). In the 18th century, in the period of transition from the Enlightenment to a ‘sentimental,’ expression-oriented conception of (dance) movement (in the sense of ‘movere’), such a change of paradigm clearly manifests itself in the opposition between the idea of dancing as a ‘learned art’ and that of movements designed to ‘touch the feelings.’ In his treatise Beschreibung wahrer Tanz-Kunst (Description of a True Art of Dancing, 1707) the Leipzig dancing and fencing master Johann Pasch wrote:

"The true art of dancing is in theoria a science that sets or gives nature’s urge towards more than highly necessary or joyful movement (per disciplinas philosophicas) such rules as enable the movement to be performed in praxi (in specie per disciplinas mathematicas) rationally and also naturally and humanly and used for one purpose or another." (Pasch 1978: 16, translation: Brandstetter)

Since the mid-18th century such an understanding of dance, which is in theoria a science” (ibid), as a regulator of an (aesthetic) upbringing in and through movement, has confronted a concept of dance as an art of expression. A resistance to theory (de Man 1986) manifests itself inter alia in delegating the disciplining function of theoria as an ordering of our knowledge of dancing and ‘shifting’ the momentum of the movement into the relation to and through the (non-regulatable) expression. The claim of a non-artificial art of dance movement as understood by Gasparo Angiolini, Jean-Georges Noverre and Friedrich Schiller consists in touching the feelings of the spectator.

A leap into the modern phase in the history of dance is marked by a clear break in the relationship between the theory and practice of dance. If the 18th century models that defined ‘dance’ itself as a form of “theoria“ (Pasch 1978: 16) were still variants of a systematic and rational concept of the nature of human beings and their environment, by the beginning of the 20th century general narrative theories of dance were becoming obsolete. For this very reason in this period of social, media and aesthetic upheaval a clear caesura, a dividing line between dance theory and practice is no longer even discernible. As in 20th century theatre, new concepts and aesthetics of dance succeed each other at ever shorter intervals in the history of dance: In the end it is the scientific and philosophical findings about movement on the one hand and the concepts of influential dance practitioners on the other that mutually influence each other – see the researches of Hermann von Helmholtz, the philosophy of Henri Bergson, or the dance and choreographical concepts of Rudolf von Laban and as well the body and movement theories of the great phenomenological philosophers Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The reflection takes place in dance itself. Highly variegated models of self-reflectivity mark the dance of the avant-garde and the multifarious character of the dance and performance scene from the 1960s to today’s contemporary dance. It would take us too far afield to broach all this here even in summary fashion. It should be noted, however, that this ‘implication’ (enfolding) of theory in dance refers not only to a – however defined – self-reflectivity of the performers’ own modes of presentation. Even the processes of production, the work of drafting and rehearsing, the media, the (self-) promotion discourses are part of a praxeological, a theoretically ‘informed’ form of contemporary dance: Where should we seek the caesura between theory and dance (praxis) here? It may be significant that the im-balance itself is ironically overlaid, e.g. by the fact that the endless discourse, the blur, the project description and literary reviews are calmly incorporated in the dance production as a textual supplement in the form, for example, of self-interviews (Ingvartsen/Chauchat 2008), which a number of contemporary dancers and choreographers – e.g. Frédéric Gies, Jefra van Dinther, Mette Ingvartsen, Alice

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6 It is a concept of dance which even Plato regarded as the regulator of a physically healthy upbringing: somewhere between military exercises and disciplined actions in the public sphere.
Chauchat, Isabelle Schad, Xavier Le Roy – have declared to be a genuine element of their artistic work. The relationship between dance and theory is one that has to be perpetually renegotiated in frictions and disruptions.

As in a mobile in which the threads and manifold ‘(im-)ponderabilia’ are constantly and unpredictably dancing and shifting in space and time – one finds oneself surrounded by a multitude of contemporary works of ‘dance theory’ and unable to take a step further.

A shift of perspective is called for: I want to step to one side and, instead of taking historical approaches to concepts and discourses on the relationship between dance and theory, I would now like to interrogate aesthetic models representing aesthetics that stand in a special relationship to dance and dance discourses and can be considered part of the history of reflection on this relationship. I shall choose two such aesthetic models – and attempt to read them as ‘figurations’ of a balance (or: dis/balance) of dance and theory. The first is Paul Valéry’s Philosophie de la danse (Philosophy of the Dance, 1936) and the other is Heinrich von Kleist’s text Über das Marionettentheater (On the Marionette Theatre, 1810).

Valéry whose writings entangle poetic practice and theoretical reflection coined the concept “l’esthétique” (“esthetics”) – in contrast to the conventional concept of ‘esthétique’ (aesthetics); and he defines “esthetics” as a “study of sensations” (Valéry 1964b [1937]: 61). In so doing Valéry (very much in keeping with the thinking of his time) not only links the idea of aesthetics to perception theory; he also abandons (once again, as if in passing) any attempt to view theory as work on a concept (see Hegel’s ‘Arbeit am Begriff,’ Hegel 1970: 65). Instead there is opened up – in the kinaesthetic sense – a place of viewing and feeling, which is virtually saturated with ‘theory.’ In L’âme et la danse (Dance and the Soul, Valéry 1956 [1923]) a Socratic reflection is attributed to the female dancer: movement is an activity that gives food for thought, and the dancer is in her action, in her dancing, Socratic: “[A]ccording to you,” says Phaidros in Valéry’s text, which is in the form of a dialogue, “this dancer would [...] have something Socratic – teaching us, in the matter of walking, to know ourselves a little better” (ibid: 38). Taking walking as an example, the “simple [...] walk” (ibid: 37) of the dancer, this praxis of moving oneself is described as a form of Socratic reflection, a “theoria” of knowledge that reveals itself in interaction, dialogue, movement. A simple walk, the walk of the dancer: “She begins with her art as its highest; she walks naturally on the summit she has attained. This second nature is what is farthest removed from the first, but they must be so like as to be mistaken the one for the other” (ibid). The aesthetic paradigm of mimesis and art, which conceals her artifice and appears to be (second) nature, is surpassed at this point. It is a mimesis of a movement in (and of) itself, a reflection of walking and the walk simply in walking. It is precisely this (apparently wholly self-related)

reflexivity that unfolds her potential – a ‘theoria’ without a concept – for relating. It is, if one wants to be ‘Socratic’ about it, an apostrophizing, an addressing of the Other/Others in dialogue. The walk, “which has but itself for end,” becomes “an universal model” (ibid: 39), which causes us “to know ourselves a little better” with regard to the walk (ibid: 38). Thus this dancer’s way of walking turns out to be not only an exploration and mediation, but also the production of a theory – an “universal model” (ibid: 39) of the movement of walking.6 The movement also turns itself – dialectically – into its opposite. Socrates muses: “I contemplate this woman who is walking and yet gives me the sense of the motionless” (ibid). Between mobility and immobility ‘stillness’ can be experienced as momentum, as ‘ponderation.’ Stillness as ‘contradiction’ (ibid: 40); and stillness as ‘suspense of breath and of the heart!’ (ibid) – a moment of weightlessness.7

Valéry’s text not only deals with the Socratic potential of dance. It also speaks of the constitutive significance which the frameworks and (institutional, social, cultic) contexts possess for the dance; and also the pro and contra of hermeneutics, versions, knowledge-attributions will be discussed in dialogue by the observer of the resulting dance. The question of a philosophical, phenomenological purpose – “But what then is dance, and what can steps say?” (ibid: 44) – is not followed by any essential designation, but by a truly Socratic twist: an infiltration of the dance movement – its “subtle displacement” (ibid: 49), its physical, liberating dynamism and power of transformation into philosophical thinking. The shift in weight between dance and theory is translated into an image of flame8 and its transformation of matter into self-devouring movement. The body gets into a state “comparable to flame, in the midst of the most active exchanges. [...] We can no longer speak of ‘movement’ [...] nor distinguish any longer its acts from its limbs” (ibid: 57). Valéry’s text itself describes a constant transformation of dancing and philosophical/theoretical enunciations into each other – a kind of parallellism of the acts of dance and theory: “She is dancing yonder and gives to the eyes what here you are trying to tell us” (ibid: 58).

Valéry’s text can be read as a phenomenology of movement; as a theory of action hinging in the balance between activity and passivity, movement and that mirror of her forces she places with symmetry her alternating tread; the heel pouring the body towards the toe, the other foot passing and receiving the body, and pouring it onwards again; and so on and on; whilst the adorble crest of her head traces in the eternal present the brow, as it were, of an undulating wave.” (Valéry 1956 [1923]: 38 et seq.)

9 Socrates: “Gravity falls at her feet.” (Valéry 1956 [1923]: 40-41)
10 On the flame image with regard to dance, as an image of transformation, cf. Rainer Maria Rilke's sonnet “Spanish Dancer” (Rilke 1986 [1907]; Brandstetter 1995: 282-289; Schuster 2011).
stillness. And it demonstrates the *transposition* of dance and theory as a ‘movere’ in the observer who (in a psychic, mental, physical, sensory sense) is ‘set’ in motion.

Most interesting of all, however, are the tropes that occur as figurations, as media and ‘movens’ of transformation. In Valéry they are flame and vortex. And the notions of lightness and heaviness. In the aesthetic discourse of body and movement these images have a long and ramified tradition (Brandstetter 2003).

Balance, and dis/balance, light and strong, gravitas and anti-gravity movement are also the subject of Heinrich von Kleist’s dialogue On the Marionette Theatre (Kleist 1972 [1810]). The conversation in the first of the three narratives, which make up the treatise turns on the movement of puppets. A dialogue arises out of a series of theses and narrative proofs between a professional dancer and the first-person narrator, who has a dilettante’s interest in art. In his reading of Kleist’s Marionette Theatre Paul de Man (1984) highlights the trope of proof: in the course of the narrative, proof, assessment, uncertainties constantly emerge in the movement of the dialogue; dis/balances of comprehensibility and knowledge transfer. As in Valéry’s dialogue on dance, when Socrates describes as potential his “uncertainty” (Valéry 1956 [1923]: 48) about what dance movement is, Kleist’s text also plays with the “loss of hermeneutic control” (de Man 1984: 269). This uncertainty is what drives the act of proving: “When a persuasion has to become a scene of persuasion one is no longer in the same way persuaded of its persuasiveness” (ibid) concludes Paul de Man.

Here I want to concentrate only on the first, the Marionette Theatre story of the treatise, albeit it should at least be remembered that Kleist’s whole text (with the thorn extraction episode and the story of the fencing bear) is an ironical, indeed bitterly pointed comment on the aperusias of an aesthetic education of idealism. Instead of directing aesthetic education towards freedom, the lightness of play, as in Schiller, Kleist focuses on doubts, the — as de Man puts it — “heavy breathing of a self that remains incapable of such disinterestedness” (ibid: 279). On the other hand there are the puppets, which execute movements that do not originate with each other but are only passed on to them by the movements of the puppeteer, to whom they are linked by a system of threads and strings.

“All their aesthetic charm stems from the transformations undergone by the linear motion of the puppeteer as it becomes a dazzling display of curves and arabesques. [...] The aesthetic power is located neither in the puppet nor in the puppeteer but in the text that spins itself between them. This text is the transformational system, the anamorphosis of the line as it twists and turns into the tropes of ellipses, parabola, and hyperbola.” (Ibid: 285 et seq.)

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11 Cf. de Man 1984; Brandstetter 2007a; Brandstetter 2011b; Theisen 1996; Blumberger 2011. For an overview of related research see Marwyck 2010: 149.

“Tropes,” according to Paul de Man, “are quantified systems of motion” (Ibid: 286).

The place of the patterns of expression is taken by mathematics: a *mathematics of dance* (Tänzerische Mathematik, 1926), as Oskar Schlemmer was to explain a hundred years later in his text of the same title (also dealing with dance theory), a ‘Bauhaus’ dance, in which he refers to Kleist’s Marionette Theatre (Brandstetter 2008).

Herr C., in Kleist’s text, presents himself as a dancer and theoretician of motion, who sees the ideally graceful movement realized not by the human body or the expressive art of dancers, but in the lines of the mechanical movements of puppets. These puppets have, Herr C. argues, a decisive advantage over human beings when it comes to movement: They are “immune to gravity’s force”

“They know nothing of the inertia of matter, that quality which above all is diametrically opposed to the dance, because the force that lifts them into the air is greater than the one that binds them to the earth” (Kleist 1972 [1810]: 24). And their grace consists in the fact that their movements follow the centre of gravity which is controlled in the limbs by the puppeteer. To the queries of his puzzled interlocutor the dance theoretician and practitioner, Herr. C. replies: Seen from a mechanical point of view, this process is “simple” (Ibid: 23):

“The line that the centre of gravity must describe was, to be sure, very simple, and was, he felt, in most cases a straight line. In cases where that line is not straight, it appears that the law of the curvature is at least of the first or, at best, of the second rank, and additionally in this latter case only elliptical. This form of movement of the human body’s extremities is natural, because of the joints, and therefore would require no great skill on the part of the puppeteer to approximate it.” (Ibid)

From the other point of view, however, the dancer continued, the movement of this line was “very mysterious”: “For it is nothing other than the path to the soul of the dancer, and Herr C. doubted that it could be proven otherwise that through this line the puppeteer placed himself in the centre of gravity of the marionette; that is to say, in other words, that the puppeteer danced” (Ibid). This dance-like transposition or dis/placement is the precondition for the movement: ‘transposing oneself’ to another centre of gravity. In Kleist’s ‘mathematics’ this elliptical movement is a broken, an interrupted movement. An ellipse is a geometrical figure with two centres of gravity. Thus what happens is always relational – a movement that implicates both the puppet master and the puppet – or the actor and the observer. The mover (operator) does not remain unmoved. The mechanical dance cannot, Mr. C. admits, “be managed entirely without some feeling”

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12 “The indeterminations of imitation and of hermeneutics have at last been formalized into a mathematics that no longer depends on role models or on semantic intentions.” (de Man 1984: 286)

13 See also the German expression of “antigrav” in the original text (Kleist 1962: 342).
(ibid). The operator is also an aesthete who must have an “understanding of the aesthetic of the dance” (ibid), and a moved mover. In rhetoric ellipsis also means a trope of omission or interruption. Thus the hesitancy, the shifting of the balance in the centre of gravity would also be inscribed in the most graceful movement?

Finally let us pause again one last time: Why the reference to Kleist’s Marionette Theatre, a 200-year-old text? Can this text shed any light at all on the current questions concerning the relationship between dance and theory? Has not the discussion on the grace of line in dance been obsolete since the beginning of the 20th century at the latest? Yes, and no! In dancing praxis and aesthetic theory the centre of gravity has shifted here too: Nijinsky’s Crime against grace (Hodson 1996) marked a historical caesura since which the problem of the relationship of (human) bodily movement to form has constantly had to be renegotiated. Kleist’s Marionette Theatre marked for the first time the profound crisis of these fundamental aesthetic and political questions concerning body and movement. This is what makes the text topical; it can be read as an allegory of the difficult relationship between dance and theory. In conclusion I should like to highlight a few more recurring aspects that are still explosive:

Kleist’s Marionette Theatre marked a crisis in the discourse on grace circa 1800. The text demonstrates — in dialogue form (a dialogue conducted with the reader as well) — an experiment on the limits of the movement of the human body. The puppet is used to exemplify an aesthetic of the mechanical, of the ‘non-human’ (or, nowadays, of the ‘pre-’ or ‘post-human’): a dance “operated by means of a handle” (Kleist 1972 [1810]: 23), in which the “final trace of the intellect” (ibid) has been removed from the puppet-dancer body. In the culmination of mechanization and formalization of a ‘non-human’ dance the aporia of the control of movement and violence breaks forth. The phantasm of “Über-Marionette” (Edward Gordon Craig), whose dance would be so perfect that even Vestris could not match it (cf. Kleist 1972 [1810]: 23), is after all the product of a prosthetic grace. The “craftsman” who makes the artificial limbs, the “mechanical legs” for those “unfortunate people” (ibid) who have lost their own legs should be the producer of that ideal dance figure. Here the wound referred to in Kleist’s text remains open: What place is there for the disabled body in the theory and practice of dance? And how precarious is the aesthetization of violence, injury and loss — through war, perhaps? In his experiment on the limits of human movement, which Kleist pursues to the point of crisis, he also examines the How, the form and question of the possibilities of mediation — this also being a problem that nowadays is referred to in the discourse of dancers and theoreticians with the (somewhat hackneyed) formulas of (trans-) mediality, ‘agency’ and institution or ‘institutional critique.’ The questions of ‘light/easy’ and ‘heavy/difficult’ which Kleist’s ‘antigrav’ puppets raise in a literal sense, have not lost any of their weight. They have cropped up elsewhere, shifted to other contexts: ‘Heavy/difficult’ — e.g. as a shifting of weight, as ‘give and take weight’ in contact improvisation — has become an important criterion of kinaesthetic (self-) exploration (cf. Reynolds 2007; Foster 2011: 6 et seq., 73 et seq.; Nora Heilman quoted in Manning 2009: 232, note 27) — in a meshing of the praxis and theory of contemporary dance in the sense of ‘sensory awareness’ practices. In addition, however, the ‘heavy/difficult’ and the ‘light/easy’ have also undergone a shift in meaning with regard to the question of ‘ability’, performance and their (stage) representation. The model of a virtuosity (cf. Brandstetter/Neumann 2011b; Brandstetter 2007b) that makes the ‘heavy/difficult,’ the heaviest and most difficult seem ‘light and easy,’ indeed like child’s play, has (more or less) disappeared from contemporary dancing and thinking. The choice of subject is rather how laborious, strenuous, painful the ‘heavy/difficult’ can be — e.g. a form of discipline, ‘work’ and/or alienation. And equally the question of the ‘light/easy’ arises in new contexts: Is it easy to choreograph everyday movements, movements that ‘come easily,’ as dance? The association with ‘easy come’ (as in ‘easy come, easy go’) signalaizes a possible trap — and yet variations of the experiment with such an aesthetic of the ‘light/easy’ variety have always been with us from the postmodernists up to contemporary artists such as for instance the Praticable group with Isabelle Schad, Frédéric Gies and others. There is also the question of ‘negotiations’ about what is recognized as ‘light/easy’: Douglas Dunn sees in this idea of understanding a dance, e.g. in Walking Back (1981), from the stratification of different attentions, a form of freedom which releases both actors and observers of the “obligation to take the same view of this experience” (Dunn 1983: 55, translation: Brandstetter). The text, or image, which emerges in the course of such a play of attention between actors and observers certainly follows a different pattern than Kleist’s tropes of movement. Yet there are connections. The first-person narrator in Kleist’s Marionette Theatre confessions at the end of the narratives, theses and arguments on experimental movements, that he is “somewhat at loose ends” (Kleist 1972 [1810]: 26). It is not only the attention that is distracted; the image of the body in movement is also distracted, displaced and criss-crossed by fissures of reflection. Kleist’s Marionette Theatre is a text on crises of categorisation in the relationship between (dance) praxis and theory. Balance and dis/balance in these (changing) relationships are no longer controllable — and perhaps therein lies the fascination and the potential of a relationship between both in motion.

“One who dances never stands with both feet planted firmly on the ground of reality” (Waldfens 2010: 235, translation: Brandstetter), the philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels has written. And he juxtaposes this with Husserl’s dictum that philosophy must “start from below” (“bodenlos anfangen”) (ibid). An — admittedly unstable — linkage of dance and theory could then be described as (this too being only a trope of ‘displacement’): “An expression in the form of dance that consists in a testing of the ground (ein Abstutzen des Bodens) and an execution of groping movements (eine Ausführung tastender Bewegung).” (Ibid)

14 The concepts (originating with Bakhtin) of “intertextuality” and “dialogicity” should be borne in mind here (cf. Lachmann 1982).
REFERENCES


