How are we to think about the relationship between dance and politics? Might it mean not only understanding dance politically, but also considering the politics of dance? The history and the discourse of dance is a history of the intricate negotiations between body, movement and politics: what André Lepecki calls the “choreo-political.”

And the discourses and interpretations of Dance Studies reflect and address these questions with shifting degrees of emphasis. Yes, the political has for some time now been a search formula for an understanding of dance, and one that has managed to direct public attention to many of its different forms.

What can be said to be political is the relationship between aesthetics and power, the coincidence of political and aesthetic representation, for example in the dances at the court of Louis XIV – as Mark Franko’s reading of *The King’s Two Bodies* referring to Kantorowicz, has shown.

Also political are the dances and movements portrayed by those choreographers whose pieces deal with questions of power, hierarchies, law and justice, inclusions and exclusions. A random sampling might include: Kurt Jooss’s *The Green Table*, Jean Weidt’s workers’ choirs, Valeska Gert’s socially critical dance sketches, Martha

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Graham’s *American* pieces,4 or the (early) Pina Bausch’s choreographies with their unsparing critical view of the social conventions and social roles of post-war Germany.

Finally the word *political* applies – quite openly and evidently – to those productions of a politically committed dance and performance scene, close to the Agitprop theatre, that uses movement choreo-politically in the sense of an emancipatory act – whether in the Europe of the 1968 student revolts;5 or – in another guise – in the context of the revolutionary new concepts of everyday body, everyday movement and everyday space as publicly performed by the members of the Judson Dance Theater: *Democracy’s body*, as Sally Banes puts it.

Another – and terrible – chapter of the *political* is the history of all those dancers and choreographers who were persecuted, forced into internal emigration or driven into exile – the list is shockingly long. A historical investigation of the dancers persecuted and forced to emigrate in the Nazi period,7 or of the history of violence, censorship, oppression and secret surveillance, as in the case of the dancer Oda Schottmüller in the former East Germany, will help clarify the history of political consciousness. Examples of studies that take on this task are the ones that expose the instrumentalization of dance – whether folk dancing (as in the Nazi period)8 or stage performances subjected to a political concept (e.g. *Social Realism*) or serving propaganda purposes, or stigmatised by in- and exclusions of racism.9 The

4 See also Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism/ Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
7 See e.g. the studies/exhibitions of Andrea Amort, as presented in Vienna in 2000: *Tanz im Exil*, Exhibition at the Österreichische Theatermuseum, lecture and performance program in cooperation with tanz2000.at & ImPulsTanz at the Wiener Akademietheater with works by Hanna Berger, Gertrud Bodenwieser, Andrei Jerschik and Pola Nirenska. As well in 2008: *Berührungen. Tanz vor 1938 – Tanz von heute*, festival with 33 events at the Theater Odeon et. al. places in Vienna.
9 See also Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) as well as Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies:
The fundamental question of the political as it has cropped up in dance and performance theory since the 1980s is perhaps best expressed in the words of Rustom Bharucha: “How does one begin to respect – and not just tolerate – cultural differences?” The constructions and power constellations of race, class, gender and intercultural relations have been examined in recent years with regard to dance, choreography and identity politics. At the same time the consequences of globalization and migration movements have also been treated, both in pointed performances by such performers as Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué (Who is Afraid of Representation), Ong Keng Sen and Bruno Beltrão, as well as in (equally pointed) scholarly research projects.

In addition to those studies that concern questions of identity politics in the context of globalization and migration and hence look at the projects of performers that deal with the contradictions of these discourses and transference processes (such as Guillermo Gomez-Peña or Nurkan Erpulat/Tuncay Kulağlu, whose musical-like spectacles examine questions of immigration and anti-Islamic clichés) – works of dance and performance theory are increasingly focusing on political questions of community. The renaissance of the idea of the community in theoretical discourse since the 1990s is a reaction to the social changes in the era of neo-liberalism. Political philosophers such as Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy and Paolo Virno (following Hannah Arendt) are seeking to detach the thinking on polis and comunitas from the traditional topoi of political theory, such as state and individual, nation and constitution. As well a rethinking of concepts of


11 See e.g. Ruston Bharucha, Politics of Cultural Practise; Marta Savigliano, Tango And The Political Economy Of Passion (New York: Westview Press, 1995); Sabine Sörgel, Dancing Postcolonialism: The National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007) or festivals as the performing arts festival In Transit or the Festival for Brazilian Contemporary Dance. Move Berlin, both held in Berlin.


the public spaces and the political theory of Jürgen Habermas\(^{15}\) is part of the contemporary discourse.\(^{16}\) The opposition of community and society, which Ferdinand Tönnies\(^{17}\) brought into the discourse on a political theory of the modern age, is based on the model of the Social Contract. For Tönnies the (pre-modern) social model of “community” constitutes a reduction of the complexity of modern social conditions. As Joseph Vogl has pointed out, thinking in terms of contractual theory\(^{18}\) reveals in the \textit{dichotomies between holism and atomism} a “continuing Rousseauism” in modern politics. By contrast, today’s political philosophers think of “community” in a deconstructive context: They refer to community in the \textit{plural} (communities and not in an opposition between individual and communitas), such as Jean-Luc Nancy with his thesis of \textit{being singular plural}\(^{19}\) or the paradox of a \textit{community of equals} which Jacques Rancière shows in his \textit{rethinking} of the political \textit{topoi} of the \textit{sensus communis} and the concept of \textit{égalité}.\(^{20}\) Then there is the revision of basic categories of political thinking in neo-communitarianism, as is demonstrated by Roberto Esposito\(^{21}\) with his attempt to discern in \textit{communitas} a counter-concept to “community” in the sense of allegiance or property (\textit{proprium}). The meaning of the word “munus” as contained in \textit{communitas/communis} as an obligation – i.e. something that one has got to give – indicates that “community is defined not by ‘having’ a property, but by a debt, a pledge, a gift to be given”.\(^{22}\)


\(^{16}\) See also Gerald Raunig, ed., \textit{Bildräume und Raumbilder. Repräsentationskritik in Film und Aktivismus} (Wien: turia + kant, 2004).


\(^{21}\) See also Roberto Esposito, \textit{Communitas. Ursprung und Wege der Gemeinschaft} (Berlin, Zürich: Diaphanes, 2004).

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 16.
For questions of theatre and performance theory it is precisely these approaches that afford new insights into representation and spectacle, the relationship between performer and audience. And it is no coincidence that the above-mentioned philosophers – Rancière, Nancy, Virno – have for their part dealt with questions of the theatre, dance, choreography, and body.23 It is above all questions of participation that have proved relevant with regard to the political element in dance and performance. What organizational forms of collective action are opened up by participatory practices, what dynamics of movement and synchronization of (participating) individuals do they produce?24

In the centre of this turn to the theme of community and collectivity stands “the audience” – significantly still in the singular or as plurale tantum (of which more later). Contemporary performance groups or “collectives” – such as She She Pop, LIGNA/ Radioballet, “Geheimagentur” or “danse praticable” 25 – arrange their performances in such a way as to undermine or suspend the division into performers and audience.26 A similar mode of operation, only politically more far-reaching, is employed by a group called NSK (New Slovene Art), founded in 1992 in the wake of Slovene independence. It founded the NSK State in Time, a fictitious collective formation without territorial claims, which identifies with no really existing state or political organization and has now grown to be a collective (art)work – a “social sculpture” – with about ten thousand members.27 With their

25 See also Gabriele Brandsdeter on Frédéric Gies and other members of performance collectives as danse praticable: “Choreographies of the Curatorial”, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Cultures of the Curatorial (conference proceedings, expected to be published in 2012).
26 For an extensive treatment of these artists’ collectives and the question of an art of the collective see Kai van Eikels, Die Kunst des Kollektiven. Performance zwischen Theater, Politik und Sozio-Ökonomie (Berlin, 2011, in print).
27 From 21rd to 23rd of October the NSK held a First NSK CITIZENS’ CONGRESS at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, which the virtual art project, the social
conceptual approach – the structures of their framing and curating – the performance groups mentioned here by way of example, like the theatre and dance studies referring to their productions, are entering the realm of the political *per definitionem*: with the questioning of community, the public, decision-making and action – these are *praxes of the “choreo-political”* (A. Lepecki).

**Heteropolitics and the space of anatomy**

Now, however, I would like to approach the question of the political element in dance from a different angle and give it a different weight. I would like to invert the perspectives. Instead of proceeding from the works of performance collectives which seek to abolish the distinction between art and performance on the one hand and politics on the other (as in the above examples), I want to look at a dance performance which – apparently – remains entirely and emphatically in the aesthetic fields of theatre art, choreography and music and works *within* this representational frame. I then mean to step to one side and ask to what extent the aesthetic can be considered to be political: how dance performance may be seen as the place of the *Other*, as a “space” in which “something happens.”

In referring to Theodor W. Adorno’s *Aesthetic I would like to view these considerations in a perspective that draws on a different understanding of the political: the *heteropolitics* of dance. Of course, there can be no question of simply applying Adorno’s theory here, nor of generalizing from the historical context of his concept of art, which mainly relates to the literature and music of the 19th century and to 20th century Modernism. His thesis that the aesthetic as the political element of a work of art is determined precisely by its negativity, by the fact that it – the work of art – “keinem Heteronomen sich beugt und sich gänzlich nach dem je eigenen Gesetz sculptur...
konstituiert” could be a basic concept of rethinking the political in dance (as in art). For Adorno it is not the interests or “intentions” of the author or the work that is decisive; and by the same token – as Adorno said in his *Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft* – it cannot be a matter of using works of art as “Demonstrationsobjekte soziologischer Theorien.” Art, as understood by Adorno, can only be critical – and hence also political – if it is not committed. The direct commitment of art would be a “erpresste” – and therefore futile – “Versöhnung”, risking “eines Rückfalls in bloße Ideologie”. A work of art can only be critical if it remains autonomous and maintains its aesthetic distance from society: “Nur vermöge dieser Differenz, nicht durch deren Verleugnung, wird das Kunstwerk beides, Kunstwerk und richtiges Bewußtsein.” The idea of “proper consciousness” seems hardly transferable to current socio-political and aesthetic conditions. But the concept of “autonomy” is a different story – if one regards it not just from the perspective of an autonomous aesthetic of the bourgeois and modern art periods (i.e. historically), but in light of Adorno’s theory of aesthetic negativity. In his study on Adorno, Christoph Menke pointed out the dual character of art: “fait social and autonomy”. It is in the autonomy, the alterity of art, that we see the political in the sense of difference. This “otherness” of art contains and preserves the

33 The question of engagement and disengagement is raised in the contemporary discourse on dance – hence not referring to Adorno and the Critical Theory but to Gilles Deleuze compare André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (London: Routledge, 2005).
35 Ibid.
36 T.W. Adorno: “Erpreßte Versöhnung”, p. 261. (“Only by virtue of this difference, and not by denying it, does the work of art become both work of art and correct consciousness”, T.W. Adorno, ibid.).

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“widerspruchsvollen Grundverhältnisse der Gesellschaft”38, since art in its aesthetic negativity eludes the identifying concept as an instrument of rationality.39 Thus if we want to understand the aesthetic in its alterity, one could bring Adorno and Nancy into conversation with each other and see dance as the place of the Other; its difference – its heteropolitics – shows itself (in Nancy’s case) in the fact that in terms of an economy of productivity “something completely useless is produced” – a “zero benefit” (usefulness) or an “extra benefit” (a gift), to use Nancy’s term.40

Xavier Le Roy’s re-vision of Le Sacre du Printemps

The dance performance that I would like to consider from this point of view (of autonomy and alterity, with Adorno and Nancy), is Xavier Le Roy’s *Le Sacre du printemps*, a piece that is played in the artificial space of the theatre and that composes its material in references to the arts of dance, music, and video/film. In what way would the aesthetics of this performance – in so far as it opens a place of the Other, of difference, in the apparently autonomous aesthetic reflexivity of a dance piece over and above the reception of a dance piece (namely Stravinsky’s/Nijinsky’s *Le Sacre du printemps*, 1913) – have to be seen as political? In the press reception of Xavier Le Roy’s *Le Sacre du printemps*41 there is a clear emphasis on the manner of producing the performance and its contextualization, such as its relationship with Le Roy’s *Mouvements for Lachenmann* (2005).42 The narrative estab-
lished by the discourse and interviews with Le Roy printed in the programme reproduce the idea that the origin of the piece lay in the idea of embodying the expressive conductor movements of Sir Simon Rattle. This repeatedly crops up in the texts on this performance in quotation of Xavier Le Roy: “It really started with the movie. […] when I saw Sir Simon Rattle conducting the piece, I had the feeling that he made me think that I could see another Rite of Spring.”

Xavier Le Roy’s Sacre is a solo performance: Le Sacre du printemps without orchestra and without dancers. Translated into the choreographic relations of the plural-singular: without a corps de ballet. What is to be seen? I quote the concise description by Bojana Cvejić, who was the dramaturge of this piece by Le Roy:

In his solo Le Sacre du printemps (2007) a man comes on stage, and turns his back on an audience bathed in brilliant light. On the downbeat of his first move (which seems to resemble the gesture made by a musical conductor), the opening bars of Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du printemps emerge from under the spectators’ seats. A few minutes later, the man turns to face the audience directly and starts to ‘conduct’ them, calling on individual spectators to ‘play’ their ‘instruments’ as and when the music requires it. Things are immediately complicated, however, because the movements that would normally produce sound are instigated, in advance, by the music itself. The impression is of a mechanical karaoke. If the man were to leave the stage, it appears that the music would simply continue by itself. The ‘conductor’ in this strange concert is, of course, Le Roy who is performing in front of, and crucially with, an audience. The latter is seated in a conventional theatre auditorium that ‘mimics’ the spatial design of a symphonic orchestra in a concert hall [...].

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43 Compare Gia Kourlas, “All the Rite moves”.
The mimicking of the conducting gestures changes in the course of the performance. The expressive intensifications – of movement and of mime – are interrupted at significant stages of the action: Le Roy remains calmly standing at his place, listening intently and without (conducting) movements to the music, which continues to stream from the loudspeakers; or he strolls casually to the edge of the stage, with the gesture of off-performance.

These pauses are followed by a resumption of the conducting motions. Towards the end of Sacre, in the sacrificial dance of the Chosen One, the conducting movements intensify, their dynamic culminating in a series of leaps. At this point the conducting gestures are combined with quotations or allusions from Nijinsky’s choreography for Le Sacre du printemps (1913) and from its reconstruction by Millicent Hodson (1987)\(^45\) and that of Pina Bausch (1975)\(^46\), a repertoire of quotations that may be indecipherable to but few viewers, yet as a portrayal of movement, which creates that extra in the performance, the “extra


benefit” of which Nancy speaks, it can be aesthetically experienced by all sensitive viewers.

In *Sacre*, Le Roy dispenses with reference figures both of dance and of music. In so doing he dispenses with such conventions of artistic re/presentation as conducting or dancing. And he also dispenses with the framework and organizational forms of art: the institutional aspect of a *concert* is just as pared down as that of a dance/ballet performance at the opera. At the same time the “dispensed with” configurations of art presentation are restored – albeit fragmentarily, in references and hints: the empty (theatre) space; the demarcation of (concert, theatre) audience and stage, and, finally, the performance of only one performer – *pars pro toto* – one for all. Thus the conventionalized interpretation patterns for the presentation are also dispensed with. Indeed, they are not only dispensed with but destroyed. Is what Le Roy is showing on the stage “conducting”? Is it “dancing”? Or both? Or neither?48 In so far as Le Roy’s performance destroys what Adorno would call an “identifying” perception and repeatedly undermines attributions in nuances or in clear breaks, he opens that aesthetic space of the *Other* in which the “zero benefit” (Nancy) lurks as extra and potential for resistance. Of course one can see Le Roy’s *Sacre* as socially critical: as an ironic or parodistic reworking of the conducting rites of the concert hall: a game with the fringes of the art scene, demonstrated in the shift from the (wealthiness) of the established philharmonic orchestra to the (poor? less rich?) off-scene of performance art. However, the “differently” political (heteropolitical) aspect of this performance – in the sense of

47 See also Noémie Salomon, “Conducting Movement: Xavier Le Roy and the Amplification of Le Sacre du printemps”, *Dance Research Journal*, 43/1 (Summer 2011): pp. 65–80. In her article on Xavier Le Roy’s *Le Sacre du printemps* Noémie Salomon focusses this aspect of conducting as dance. Upon the idea of conducting as a practice of wielding power (and “the anti-Semitic background of the art of conduct” (p. 73) with a view to Adorno’s denegation of Strawinsky’s music) Salomon interprets Le Roy’s performance as “nothing but dance” (p. 74): “Le Roy’s art of conduct thus intensifies the work of the body and its abilities to act and react; […] it amplifies gestures, sounds, affects, and histories through – and as – movement, thus expanding the choreographic territory to the forceful, exhilarating, and transformative gestures of conducting.” (p. 78). Hence, the musical fractions, the pauses, the torsions – the turn of the figure –, as well as the inter-medial aspect and the potentially critical part of Le Roy’s *Performance* are, in my opinion, overlooked in this article.

the aforementioned theory of an aesthetic negativity of art – goes even further.

I would like to explore this question on the basis of two key aspects of Le Roy’s Sacre: one concerning “conducting – dancing”; and the other “sacrifice”, sacrificium.

Conducting – dancing: dilettantism or the indecisiveness of motion?

Even a viewer possessing no information about the background to Le Roy’s performance, i.e. one who is unfamiliar with Sir Simon Rattle’s film *Rhythm is it!* will be confronted as a viewer in multiple ways with Le Roy’s “mono” performance of conducting, involving the absence of referential patterns; the dark empty stage, the music coming from loudspeakers, and the “conducting” dancer’s facing the audience, his addressing of the spectator directly with typical movements and cue gestures of conducting, and finally the pauses, the different movements that are out of synch with the conducting role – all this makes the performance in a certain sense unqualifiable. Something seems familiar – and yet it is still not possible to evaluate the performance on well-known rules. It is the aesthetic experience of an Other. Something is not quite right. It would be interesting to investigate the various attempts at qualifying Le Roy’s “conducting”: starting with musicians, or connoisseurs who diagnose “errors” in his technique of conducting, through those who feel uneasy or “out of place” when he is treating the audience “as orchestra”, to those who see the performance as a game, or find it “funny”. For the sake of my argument, however, it is the difference between mastery/virtuosity (of conducting) and dilettantism that is of primary interest. The tradition of the great or “virtuoso” conductor extends from the 19th to the 20th centuries, from Hans von Bülow to Arturo Toscanini, Herbert von Karajan, and Sir Simon Rattle too. In the figure of the conductor a dual model of the virtuoso crystallizes: the outstanding mastery of an instrument and the fasci-

49 The relation to this film, i.e. the “source” of the performance in a film/video, the intermediality, and the question of the “educational” context of this project of Rattle as a “project”, would require a separate analysis. One could advance the thesis that here too Le Roy’s Sacre adopts a contrary position that is aesthetically immanent and “negative”, as his concept of “learning”/assimilating runs counter to the “disciplinary model” of Roysten Maldoom as shown in the film.

50 See also Gia Kourlas, “All the Rite moves. Xavier Le Roy faces the music (and sort of dances)”, where Kourlas quotes Le Roy’s comments on different reactions by the audience.

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nation he exercises over the audience on the basis of a performance about his self. It is a doubly hierarchical performance model, since the instrument in this case is the apparatus, the body of the orchestra, which the conductor masters with the slightest flick of a finger (or of the conductor’s baton, which signifies the imperial gesture). And by virtue of this power over a (multi-part) sound-body he also exercises a powerful fascination over the audience.\(^5^1\) Adorno expresses in extreme form the fetishization bestowed upon the public figure of the virtuoso conductor when he writes: “Nicht umsonst gemahnt die Herrschaft der arrivierten Dirigenten an die des totalitären Führers […]. Er ist der eigentlich moderne Typ des Virtuosen: als band leader so gut wie in der Philharmonie”.\(^5^2\) Le Roy’s mimesis, the imitation of the virtuoso, the highly expressive figure of the conductor deconstructs this position of power and the hierarchies associated with it by the way of his “conducting” the movements of conduction. Even if Le Roy’s “background narrative”\(^5^3\) suggests his debt to the conductor Sir Simon Rattle, his conducting plays out the difference to the virtuoso conductor.\(^5^4\)


52 See also Theodor W. Adorno, “Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Progression des Hörens”, Dissonanzen. Musik in der veralteten Welt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956), pp. 9–45, here: p. 27. (“Not for nothing is the power of the successful conductors reminiscent of that of the totalitarian leader […]. He is in fact the type of the modern virtuoso: whether as band leader or as the conductor of a philharmonic orchestra”, (translated by Iain W.M. Taylor). On the question of “conducting” compare Noémie Salomon; within her argumentation she is drawing on an fascistic and anti-Semitic history of the power of conducting (p. 70–73), whereas my interpretation of the “power” of the conductor refers to the configuration of “virtuoso” and audience – and the question, how traces of dilettantism and imperfection within Le Roy’s performance break the power and constraint of the conductor/virtuoso-model.

53 See also Gia Kourlas and Le Roy’s comments on his impression of the movie Rhythm is it! where Sir Simon Rattle conducts Le Sacre.

54 The question of whether and exactly how an actor’s imitation of conducting can be construed as “conducting” is also discussed, with controversial opinions.
The transmitted sound from loudspeakers placed under the seats of the audience, reinforces the impression of difference created by this “conducting”: The time lapse – the performer conducts the canned/reproduced (recorded) musical performance “retroactively” – and the mechanical playing of this recording via loudspeakers, regardless of whether Le Roy makes directing gestures or their motions or just stands still, make it evident that hierarchical models of art production and aesthetic experience are being questioned here. The programme of the performance mentions the effect of an inversion of cause and function thus unfolds the gestures and the movements that are meant to prompt musicians to play seem at the same time to be produced by the music that they are supposed to produce. Le Roy opens an intermediate zone, in a temporal-spatial movement of irresolution, in which various forms of liveness take place. The counter-model to the virtuoso is not just that of the dilettante. Even if we were to use a more positive term like amateur, there is more at stake here than the dichotomies between professionals and laity. The fact that Le Roy’s “conducting” – in the unqualifiable zone between mimesis of conducting movements, expressive ballet-mime performance, and self-interrupting reflection – is to be assigned neither to the virtuoso nor the dilettante, lends the performance the potential of an aesthetic of alterity. Bojana Cvejić has referred to this act in Le Roy’s Sacre as “recasting.” She relates this process and Jacques Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster to Le Roy’s “conducting seen as an exercise in emancipation.” As opposed to this “emancipatory” interpretation I would like to underline the production of the void: the dynamic that goes along with a gap of difference, which sets in motion a recasting (a “Umbesetzung” in the sense as the philosopher Hans Blumenberg

55 The Karaoke dimension of conducting to recordings, the “music-minus-one” auto-performance of a hobby conductor would have to be regarded in this context.
56 See also Xavier Le Roy, Bojana Cevjic, Le Sacre du printemps, programme bill (New York, 2007).
58 See also Bojana Cvejić, “Recasting Le Sacre du printemps”: “Le Roy rejects a pedagogical choreography. Instead of showing the spectators what music could mean choreographically, he asks them to pretend to create it.”
coins the term) of a wide variety of positions and figurations of the aesthetic. This also includes the “figure” of the audience.⁵⁹ In Le Roy’s *Sacre* the audience is not an “audience” in the sense of a closed unity; not an audience as a multitudinous communal body that is positioned opposite the “body” of performers (orchestra/ballet) of a performance of *Le Sacre du printemps*. The other side, the opposite is inverted the moment Le Roy – back on stage with his back to the audience – turns around to face it and, imitating a conductor’s movements, treats it as an orchestra, as if he were standing face to face with the various groups of musicians to whom he was giving cues. At his moment of turning the unities of the normal performance set-up collapse, and the conventions of representation are shaken. This theatrical “as if” – Le Roy conducting the audience as a fictitious orchestra – points once again to the aesthetic negativity of this process. The gaze – the gaze *back*, from the stage into the audience – divides and particularizes the “community” (the audience in the singular), that appears in the bright light of the space not as a *unity* (neither as a fictitious “sound-body” nor as a “play-along” auditorium). Instead the atomization of the participants in that randomly gathered collective becomes visible and evident – in the numerous different reactions to the performance to be read in the face of the individual spectator: approving, listening, sceptical, observant, indifferent, distracted.

Space is opened up for a further shift in the performance of Xavier Le Roy: in his addressing of a collective that as an audience does not exactly correspond to the image of a community marked by unity. Not cohesiveness, but a “unifying” atmosphere marks the aesthetic experience. “Community” thus becomes recognizable as an (performance-theory or political?) ideological construct. Le Roy’s performance interrupts the notion of “audience” as an imaginary quantity.

**Le Sacre du printemps: Aesthetic circumcision of the sacrifice**

Le Roy’s *performance* also places a question mark over the theme of “sacrifice” (as opposed to victim). We may put it succinctly as follows: Le Roy’s version of *Le Sacre du printemps* disengages the meaning of the *sacrifice*. The myth of the ballet by Stravinsky/Nijinsky centres on

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a virtual human sacrifice – a “primitive” fertility ritual. The “scenes” from a fictitious “heathen Russia”60 are historically set in the context of primitivism in Europe. One can also read Sacre, as Modris Ekstein has done, as an allegory of the phantasms of those who sacrificed their lives in the First World War.61 The fact remains that in view of the fundamental significance of the sacrifice in Sacre there is hardly a Modernist choreography that issues such a direct, differentiated and even contradictory challenge to think about the theme of sacrifice. This very challenge provokes choreographers who produce a version, a re-vision, or a recasting of Le Sacre du printemps to take a stand. And whatever the choreographic answer to the question of the status of the sacrifice may be, it will always be both an aesthetic and a political statement. With his version of Le Sacre du printemps Xavier le Roy has taken a negative decision. Not only that he has organized the performance in such a way as to exclude the question of the victim. He questions the modernist aesthetic and the value of the sacrifice. The mythical narrative, the legitimation and the choreographic representation of the sacrificium (in its community-related function) have been left out. By shifting his interest from the choreography of a representational dance piece and its history to music (as concert performance

60 Le Sacre du printemps. Tableaux de la Russie païenne en deux parties (engl. The Rite of Spring. Pictures from Pagan Russia), is choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky and composed by Igor Stravinsky, for the Ballets Russes. Stage design by Nicholas Roerich. Premiere: on May 29, 1913 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris.
by the conductor), Le Roy abandons any attempt at a re-vision of *Le Sacre du printemps* as a self-contained piece of dance theatre. Above all, by opening gaps and introducing caesurae he rejects the *aesthetic sacrifice of art*: neither the history of dance as a discipline – the physical self-sacrifice of the dancer for the dance, nor the mastery of the virtuoso conductor (or of a virtuoso actor) takes the place of the ritual votive sacrifice of *Sacre*. In this aesthetic circumcision of the sacrifice theme and the heroic legend associated with it we see, in my opinion, the political aspect of this performance. In his study of *communitas* Roberto Esposito represents the thesis that in the political theory of the modern age, since Thomas Hobbes, the “pyramid of sacrifice” is a dominant feature. We are left with the paradox: “Life is preserved on condition of its sacrificing – through the sum of the renunciations of which the sovereign authorization consists.” The treatment of the dynamic of sacrifice, “between assumption of guilt and the decree of sacrifice,” says Esposito, marks the dual nature of *communitas*: the social element and its rejection, its undermining. The fact that in Le Roy’s *Le Sacre du printemps* the sacrifice is not able to be “consecrated” or celebrated, that it is not able to found an ecstatic community as a unified collective body, that the universal work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) – the unity of music, dance, sound, movement – cannot be revived – all this is expressed by the aesthetic negativity of Le Roy’s *Sacre* – with its inversions, caesurae and temporal shifts. And it can be seen in the changing facial expressions of the viewers as much as in the movements of Xavier le Roy.

*Translation from the German by Iain W.M. Taylor*

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62 At the same time Le Roy’s performance is also a comment on the cult of *Le Sacre du printemps*, as may be seen from the fact that he took the film *Rhythm is it!* as the starting point of his study. Also, his *Sacre* version is not least a statement on the question of the treatment of Nijinsky’s original choreography which has survived in incomplete form (despite the reconstruction by Millicent Hodson). By interpreting Stravinsky’s score, Le Roy shifts the focus from dance piece to musical performance – with the paradox, that it is performed as a *movement* (in the double sense of the word: in “corporeality” and in the terminology of music).


64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 68

66 Ibid., p. 18 f.