The documentation of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's choreography in *A Choreographer's Score*

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Abstract

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker has published three different volumes of *A Choreographer's Score* in which she explains her choreographic processes. Each of the volumes contains interviews and parts of the choreography which are recorded on DVDs and published in writing together with the scores. The need for those publications might have been triggered by Beyonce's use of de Keersmaeker's choreography in her video *Countdown* and by a general need to create a legacy for her work. The question that such a publication poses is: what is documented here? Is it based on an idea of the work or a choreographic process or is it an instruction manual for performance? How does de Keersmaeker's attempt relate to the archive as a place of reinforcing patriarchal law as stated by Jacques Derrida or is it rather an open approach to dance and performance as an art form, able to escape that law as Rebecca Schneider has discussed?

Keywords: score, recording techniques, notation, lived embodied performance, archive, de Keersmaeker

In this paper I will revisit questions of dance and performance documentation that have already been addressed numerous times, but still lack answers. To anchor those concerns in the broader debate around this topic: scholars and writers like Peggy Phelan (1993) and Marcia Siegel (1968) have mourned the loss that the ephemeral nature of performance engenders. However, they support the preservation of dance and performance so that there might be a greater acknowledgement of dance as an art form. If dance enters written discourse, which also includes the notation of dance, it will lose some of its ephemeral character whilst concomitantly achieving greater intellectual credibility.

While Phelan attributes a positive quality to the constant vanishing of performance, emphasising how this allows performance to escape the commodifying of objectification within a capitalist orientated market, nevertheless the link to loss, disappearance and mourning has not escaped negative connotations. Phelan also anchors her argument in discourse-based theoretical models from linguistics: hence she is acknowledging indirectly the importance of words and writing. Rebecca Schneider (2012) has entered into this discourse by pointing out that, rather than engendering greater acknowledgement of dance art practices, the inscription of dance through hegemonic forms of archiving—even forms that use contemporary digital technology–is an embrace of patriarchal law as it is discussed in Jacques Derrida's (1995) famous text, which compares the need to archive to a 'fever' and hence a state of malady. For Derrida, the need to archive is equivalent to the need to subscribe to and inscribe patriarchal law. In each instance, some sort of visible script or recording is produced and domesticated. Schneider dares to raise the question

of whether Phelan and Siegel are aware of what they are asking. Nevertheless, Schneider herself suggests need for a greater embrace of the lived presence of dance and performance in the embodied memory of the performers.

However, as Myriam van Imshoot (2010) notes, there is no theoretical alternative mentioned or proposed by Schneider (2012). In other words, how do we discursively acknowledge the epistemological gain of such physical and oral archives? In her embrace of practice as an engagement that is contained in the bodies of the practitioners, Schneider is not unlike Theodor W. Adorno (2006) who also looks at lived performance practice and the importance of orality within the transmission of practice. He argues that what is relevant for the understanding of practices and the ways in which they are passed on from generation to generation is crucial for influencing the discourses around them. The difference is that Adorno's approach is not explicitly gendered, while Schneider operates with a feminist psychoanalytical discourse that attributes a phallo-centric quality to the archive. For Adorno, lived performance practices are neither particularly feminine nor masculine. The reason for this might simply be that discourses and awareness of gender were not as developed when he wrote those texts. However, to highlight this aspect of Adorno's writing seems not unimportant in this case, since de Keersmaeker, whose *A Choreographer's Score* (2012)*, is discussed below, in particular, refuses to engage with feminist theory.

In this paper I am not so much interested in the technical problems that occur in the process of documenting nor the choice of format but, rather, I discuss how dance as an artistic practice—through a range of features that are inherent to it—to some extent escapes certain concepts of documenting and archiving. Therefore, the question is: does the range of archive and documentation projects often not contradict the nature of the practice itself? Nevertheless, the need to capture dances and choreographic practices seems to have increased in recent years. Numerous archives of choreographers' works, such as the archive of the work of Siobhan Davies, have been created. At the same time, a series of websites have been designed that function as archives of postmodern dance practices. Key examples include the websites of the William Forsythe Dance Company and SARMA.

The website of the William Forsythe Dance Company, apart from promoting the company and advertising events, also archives Forsythe's practice and that of others. The SARMA website is described as '…a laboratory for discourses and creative practice' (2010). Here one can find writing on dance in different formats, from scores that record process to reviews and dramaturgical reflections. The questions that surface in this context should consider what kind of information is necessary to make a particular practice accessible or to restage a piece of choreography and in which format should this information or knowledge be captured and transmitted?

In the different instances of archive and/or notation described above the agenda seems also to vary: is there an attempt here to capture the work as an entity or is the interest to document processes that can be applied to a range of choreographic settings? A key question in this context is whether or not contemporary choreography still operates in a way in which the concept of 'work' is appropriate. In other words, is the choreographic oeuvre of a particular dance practitioner characterised by

particular processes underlying the different dance pieces or by each piece being a specific 'work'? To understand the issues at hand here better, in what follows I discuss in some detail some issues raised by *A Choreographer's Score*.

It is important to give a brief overview of the discourse surrounding the different formats of documentation in order to be able to place de Keersmaeker's choreographic scores within existing frameworks. Amongst the different formats in which dance is captured scores play a very central role. On the one hand scores are still used as a means to capture the choreographic work, which seem to follow the example set by music as an arts' practice. On the other hand, starting from what is usually described as the postmodern era in dance, scores have exceeded such a role. In contemporary dance practice scores are also used to trigger or incite movement. Such a double function is important to acknowledge when it comes to comparing the role and function of the score in music and dance.

The main difference in the use of scores between the two arts practices (music and dance) seems to me to lie in the fact that scores in dance never became an inherent part of the practice and training of dancers and choreographers for numerous reasons. One reason seems to be that dance cannot be separated from those who execute it: 'In dance creation, unlike in music, the choreographer does not necessarily define his or her product independently of the dancers who are going to perform it' (Yuzurihara, 2014, p. 292). Scores cannot always capture the dynamics and qualities of the movement or leave details to the choice of the notator. Claudia Jeschke (1983), an expert in notation, claims that the origin of both dance and notation is visual, and hence there is not enough discrepancy to mediate the relationship between the two visual formats. She argues that the transfer from one sense to the other—which the notation of music demands—implies a need for rationalisation (p.141). The same need for rationalisation is not given when one stays in the same visual medium as is the case with dance and dance notation. Hence processes of coding and decoding are not taking place with the same rigour.

Dance notation has also been somewhat sidelined by the easy accessibility of filming technologies. Today, video recordings of choreography are very common. However, film recordings of dances are often problematic if the choreography involves a large number of dancers; wide angle recordings do not provide enough detail, whilst close angle recordings tend to exclude all the dancers. Therefore, both sources of documentation seem to be insufficient. This would explain the need for a range of formats to capture one piece of choreography. We often find oral archives and various forms of recordings cross-referencing and complementing each other in digital interfaces. Digital technologies also offer the possibility to capture dynamic nuances that might escape other media. More recently, Laura Karremann (2014, p. 120) has asked whether the actuality and presence that characterises dance makes it so difficult to document. Hence Karremann is suggesting that digital technology such as Piecemaker, Creation-Tool and The Choreographer's Notebook may offer better possibilities to capture what defines the here and now of the dance performance, because these technologies are multimedial and allow for the contribution of numerous authors.

Where is Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker's *A Choreographer's Score* located amongst these practices of capturing, as well as the discourses around them? She has,

together with musicologist and performance maker Bojana Cvejić, published three volumes with explanations and scores. The first volume is devoted to her earlier work *Fase* (1982), *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983), *Elena's Aria* (1984), and *Bartók/Mikrokosmos* (originally called *Mikrokosmos*, 1987) and the second volume to her latest works *En Atendant* (2010) and *Cesena* (2011). The third volume deals with work created around the turn of the millennium: *Drumming* (1998) and *Rain* (2001). All three volumes are entitled *A Choreographer's Score*. These volumes consist of a series of interviews that appear both in a recorded version on DVD and in print in a book.

Cvejić gives as a reason for this format the discrepancies between *la parole* and *l'écriture* which had to be negotiated, referring here to the terminology introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1986). Katja Čičigoj (2013), who has reviewed *A Choreographer's Score* supports this argument: for her, de Keersmaeker and Cvejić open up the difference between notation, writing about dance, and the event of performance. She perceives that there is no hierarchy between the work and text in the format of the publication. Instead, there is fluidity between the written and the recorded material.

While the video recordings of Cvejić's interviews with de Keersmaeker give a sense of the oral transmission that characterises dance, including some of the demonstrations of movement material by de Keersmaeker, nevertheless the documented scores and recordings present a rather clearly structured text in the way they try to pin down information. Hence the fluidity between the formats seems limited to watching a demonstration and reading what was spoken during this demonstration as a text. Otherwise it is a rather simple format and one keeps wondering why something more complex with contemporary digital technology has not been chosen? Easy access, time pressures and financial restrictions might be reasons for this format.

In the interviews, de Keersmaeker explains her choreographic processes in conversation with Cvejić while drawing scores on a blackboard, much like a school teacher in front of a class. The interviews are illustrated by excerpts of the choreography and, in the printed version, we also find de Keersmaeker's correspondence with her collaborators and the authorities, including local and federal government funding bodies for the arts. De Keersmaeker unveils retrospectively the processes and structures underlying her work. Now, years and even decades after the pieces have been performed, scores of the structural processes underlying them are drawn and verbally explained. Cvejić (2013, p. 8) describes this approach as a 'post-dramaturgical paradigm'. What she seems to refer to here is that the scores contain incorporated knowledge that is based upon reflections on the choreographic process after numerous performances of the choreographies.

If we compare those scores to others with which practitioners and academics might be familiar, the aesthetics and concept of their layout is ambivalent. On the one hand, they capture the structure of the work and the dynamic changes that underlie its performance as well as the link to compositional principles in the music used. They show floor plans, and the building of phrases from movement cells into various sequences with ever changing dynamics. On the other hand, the scores are clearly

not working scores and they never show the imagery that was supposed to trigger the movement.

While de Keersmaeker might have made drawings to explain to dancers certain movement sequences and might have made sketches for herself during the choreographic process, what we see in the publications is not imagery through which the choreography was triggered nor does this material represent her original notes. Even if *A Choreographer's Score* lists a breakdown of structural elements, not unlike the scores of Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, they differ profoundly from them. Brown's and Child's scores clearly reveal that they have been used during the choreographic process and made available to a certain extent afterwards, and they show this through being often messy.

Therefore, it seems important to acknowledge two different functions of the score. In her article on Rudolf von Laban's *Schrifttanz* and its use in scoring in postmodern dance, Akiko Yuzurihara refers to musicologist Charles Seeger's distinction between the prescriptive and descriptive purposes of notation: 'Prescriptive writing which is written by the composer is a tool for performers to use in realizing the piece. [...] Descriptive writing, on the other hand, is a tool for scholars who analyze folk music amongst others' (2014, p. 291). Seeger here refers to transcripts of folk music performances that have not been performed from a score. It is important to note that also with regards to music a distinction is made between two different modes of notation. The one that takes place in the process of composition (which is also the most common one) and the one where music that is transmitted through practices that do not necessarily use notation might nevertheless be captured by, for example, an ethnomusicologist. Yet, the latter is rare and only used in scholarly contexts. De Keersmaeker's score would clearly refer to the latter, while Brown's, to which the article by Yuzurihara refers in great detail, belongs to the first. Brown follows the experiments of Robert Dunn which, in turn, try to explore Laban's ideas around *Schrifttanz.* Dunn is also influenced by some of the experimental practices that have been introduced by John Cage.

But what do de Keersmaeker's scores document and for what purpose? They seem to capture the processes that have led to the choreography and as such are only, to a certain extent, useful for reconstructing the choreography. Alternatively, the scores could be a useful tool for those who teach choreography and those who study it. De Keersmaeker describes processes in which material was generated and ways in which it can be organised and arranged.

While the choreographic processes are described in great detail, the decisions that underlie the final structure of the choreography are not revealed by de Keersmaeker. For example, when she explains the choreographic process of *En Atendent* where, after giving the dancers certain parameters with which to improvise a phrase, she chooses the phrase of a particular dancer (Chrysa Parkinson), she does not explain to the reader or viewer why this phrase seems to her to be the most suitable for forming the basis of the piece nor why she rejects the other dancers' phrases. At one point, Cvejić asks her if this is the way she creates choreography and she waves with her hand, no. Does she not wish to give away her key decision-making processes, or does she find it difficult to explain how and why she makes certain choreographic choices?

At the same time, a number of elements that are part of the performance are not documented. For example, the particular effort qualities that characterise the movement and the ways in which breathing rhythms synchronise the movements of the different dancers are not described. Is this deliberate or is it too difficult and too complex to notate these qualities in detail? By not describing those components in detail and/or finding a means to record them, these aspects of the choreography remain part of the oral transmission of the piece.

An aesthetic framing of some of the organising principles is also given as, for example, why she uses the Fibonacci sequence, secret geometry and other devices to organise her material. In short, she tries to explain some of the artistic choices she made by finding overarching metaphysical principles that justify her decision-making processes with regards to preferring a particular aesthetic outcome over another. Therefore, one might conclude that the information given allows insight into the choreographic structure, but does not allow one to reconstruct the choreography in its entirety. As notation, this might pose a number of problems.

The reason why these volumes have been published now, is not quite made explicit. One of the reasons de Keersmaeker mentions is the approaching end of her career as a performer, as well as the loss of her parents and a close friend. There might have been a need to have a document with regards to copyright, because pop singer Beyonce in her video *Countdown* makes reference to *Rosas danst Rosas, but* one might only speculate here. Cvejić, who is a performance maker and musicologist, frames the publications also in the tradition of the *Urtextausgabe* as it is known in musicology: 'At their worse they [critical editions] are anal-retentive documents of what Derrida described as "archive fever", favouring the composer's version as the ur-instance of the work prior to the well-known "death of the author" debate.' (2012, p. 10). The publication of *Urtext* editions defined the blooming period of musicology at the end of the 19th century with the frantic editing and publishing of musical works of the past centuries. Some of them were even named *Monumente der Tonkunst* [Monuments of tonal art]. The question that surfaces is, what does this need to turn music into a monument reflect? But the more pertinent question seems to be, since there is an awareness of the problematic of the *Urtextausgabe*, why reproduce it?

These developments in music reflect the coming into being of the concept of 'the work' according to Lydia Goehr in her *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992). The concept of the musical work also changes the role of the composer: he—seldom she—transforms into an independent self-employed artist who gains royalties from his art works which in return have to be recognised as such (1992, p. 207). This means that musicians and composers were no longer predominantly performers who realised their artistic ideas in ever-varying performances, but the 'owners' of work that needed to be fixed, precisely in order to be owned. This manifests itself in documents like the *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works* from 1886.

The revision of copyright law also played a crucial role in this context (Goehr,1992, p. 219). Scores had to capture the musical composition in much more detail; for example, the instrumentation was no longer left to the performer.

The ideal of *Werktreue* [fidelity to the work] emerged to capture the new relation between work and performance as well as between performer and composer: "Performances and their performers were respectively subservient to works and their composers" (Goehr, 1992, p. 231).

The conductor came into existence—performances were not any longer directed from the cembalo, as Mozart did customarily with his concerts and operas.

Such a change of the role of the arts practitioner can well be observed with regards to the pieces documented in *A Choreographer's Score*. The choreography is no longer a live event, strongly informed by de Keersmaeker being not only the creator of them, but also a performer who—maybe not so dissimilar from Mozart on the cembalo—was part of and hence had a direct influence on the performance itself. In the score, the choreography gains something of a work-like character and becomes to a certain extent an object. To be an object makes the choreography fit into a tradition of arts' appreciation that originates in fine art and it also provide a legal document for the purpose of copyright protection. In the publication Cvejić points out that, as de Keersmaeker's pieces of choreography enter the repertory, a certain objectification occurs. A part created by a particular dancer becomes a role; therefore, as puzzling as it might seem, de Keersmaeker refers to herself as Anne Teresa in the recordings and the writings, no longer referring to herself as a performer, but rather to the part she has created.

Additionally, with regards to some of the processes underlying the creation of her work, these scores might also contradict the intentions of her work, which is based on the concentration of performers on each other rather than the correct execution of a pre-set structure/score. For example, in her early choreography *Fase* (1982), she creates a similar compositional principle of phasing to that which Steve Reich used for his musical composition. In *Vortex Temporum* (2013), she applies a similar transition between compositional principles in music and dance. In these choreographies, musical structures are not simply transferred into choreographic structures, the principles on which the music composition is based are matched in the choreography. Those principles are not so much captured in the score, but rather depend on a concentration of the performers in the here and now of the performance situation.

One might now argue that both Reich and Gérard Grisey have also published their musical compositions, yet those scores also do not quite conform to the traditional model either. Reich gives the basic musical unit that is used for the phasing and some of the phasing processes, but crucial details about the execution of the piece are provided in a verbal text. Grisey experiments with the organisation of a series of musical parameters, not dissimilar to Reich, yet coming from the French tradition, his works are highly organised in various algorithms. At the same time, they require an alertness of the performer for time and pitch that is very detailed. The piece consists of three movements. The first deals with the possible transformations of a sound wave, the second with the transformation of time. The third brings the two together. Those constructions of time are not structural, yet highly organised, and in performance again ask for an awakening of the performer's sensibility. A similar experimentation takes place in de Keersmaeker's choreography.[1]

To return to my initial debate about what is reflected in the need to archive, document and capture dance, Theodor W. Adorno has, strangely enough, dealt with the question of dance notation in his posthumously published *Towards a Theory of a Musical Reproduction* (2006). He proposed that dance notation is always invented when particular dance forms get lost or are about to die out and the memory is no longer sufficiently alive in the bodies and minds of the practitioners. The invention of Labanotation and a range of other notation systems (see also Jeschke, 1983) occurred at the time when ballet as a practice changed significantly.

The parallel seems to be striking; firstly, one might ask whether both de Keersmaeker's attempts to publish these scores of her work (and the publications of her colleagues mentioned earlier) do not reflect, within a broader context, the historical changes the practices she is using have undergone. These practices have become much more mainstream and are established teaching content in the curricula of higher education institutions. The need to document them, therefore, may also by symptomatic of a fear that they might get lost or lose what made them exciting in the dance studio during the choreographic process. In this process of inscription, are these practices now becoming part of the patriarchal law in a Derridean sense, or should this debate not become more sophisticated and avoid binary categories predicated on gender normativity?

It seems misleading to me to ask whether or not de Keersmaeker should have attempted to come up with a feminine form of documentation that challenges previous attempts to document dance and that clearly does not subscribe to patriarchal law, especially since de Keersmaeker voiced that she finds it rather difficult to embrace feminism (de Keersmaeker and Cvejić, 2012, p.15). The question that surfaces here is rather, do academics and scholars who conduct feminist research imply that their concerns must be shared by the arts practitioner in question? As mentioned earlier, de Keersmaeker has to a certain extent come up with a format that negotiates oral and written transmission. One might understand her need to preserve her work and have a document that guarantees copyright. The compliance to copyright could be looked upon as some sort of subscription to patriarchal law; however, as long as there is no alternative to this legislation what is there left for the female choreographer to do in order to protect her work? Where would this leave de Keersmaeker in her need to safeguard her work from plagiarism with regards to Beyonce making reference to her choreography and her need to preserve her work for future performances? Both—and indeed all–women still operate in a world that is determined by patriarchal law, in spite of the extent to which they are trying to question and challenge it. Do we have to wait for the establishment of matriarchal structures before it is appropriate for females to create a document and source for the recreation of their work?

Overall, the various formats of documentation seem to be a testimony to the search for ways to capture dance that also embraces the complexity of the components that need to be taken into account to preserve practice and to make a restaging of a dance piece possible. To a certain extent, they also pay homage to oral and physical forms of transmission and try to negotiate concepts of text and scripture. Contemporary technology, especially digital technology, allows for formats that are open in ways that do not claim to be definite, but rather show the fluidity that defines

live practice. However, they too are no more than a virtual recreation—which is more or less successful—of the lost moment of performance and of the lived knowledge of the practice. Their formats exceed the possibilities of traditional forms of documents to capture the experiences of performances and practices through recording devices but they are also not live or inside the body. Hence work still needs to be done with regards to formats and the interfaces between media. Will physical transmission ever be able to become a form of document?

Therefore, the overarching question seems to be does dance and performance, to some extent, escape documentation? Is it not inherent to the practice of dance as a form of performing arts that the chance of renewal occurs in every single performance? Contrary to Phelan, I would not want to refer to past performances and the bodies participating in them as lost and loss. For all of us who practice dance, is it not exactly this constant opportunity to do it again and be able to improve it this time which eventually draws us to this form of arts practice? To be able to continuously change the structure of the choreography and to transform practices seems to be a positive attribute. If we were interested in creating art that is permanent would we not have become sculptors or architects?

Acknowledgement

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1. In my publication *Structure as Process* I have explained those choreomusical relationships in greater detail in particular with *Fase*.

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Biography

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