didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

From the issue: **English Issue 2020**
DOI: 10.34762/xp1h-bt19
Source URL:
https://didaskalia.pl/en/article/dramaturgy-ghost-few-remarks-dramaturg-and-words-dance

/ NEW CHOREOGRAPHY

# Dramaturgy Like a Ghost? A Few Remarks on the Dramaturg and Words in Dance

Karolina Wycisk | Jagiellonian University in Kraków

The author begins with an observation by André Lepecki concerning the fear of working with a dramaturg. Recalling several concepts that define the role of the dramaturg in dance (Lepecki, Liesbeth Wildschut, Bojana Cvejić, Bojana Bauer, Maaike Bleeker), the author juxtaposes various interpretations of the scope and forms of collaboration with the dramaturg. She reaches the conclusion that although in a professional context, dramaturgy is most of the time associated with project-based work and the freelance economy, the fusion of various functions and the growing significance of the word in dance productions make the presence of the dramaturg increasingly desireable. At the same time, she notes that the viewer's contribution can also be considered as belonging to dramaturgy, and that the understanding of dramaturgy goes beyond the dichotomy of word/text, and movement/stage interpretation.

Keywords: dramaturgy, dramaturg, dance, performance, words

Afew years ago, André Lepecki, in an article entitled "'We Are Not Ready for the dramaturge': Some Notes for Dance Dramaturgy,"[1] wondered what was the reason for the lack of readiness to cooperate with the dramaturg in the field of contemporary dance. Based on his own experience (as a recognized researcher, he was a dramaturg in many dance projects),[2] as well as on the

responses of various choreographers and dancers whom he had sent proposals of cooperation, he came to the conclusion that the fear of cooperating with a dramaturg on the production of a performance originates from the dramaturg's potential associates assuming that she or he possesses some (previously acquired) knowledge, as a result of which she or he becomes, in the eyes of those potential associates, a figure of someone who "should know" what the performance is (or is to be) about. Thus, not being ready to cooperate with a dramaturg at the same time leads to postponing the moment when this knowledge is acquired ("Readiness for knowing what the piece is (about)";[3] Lepecki 2010, p. 185), in hopes that when the dramaturg actually comes in she or he will be able to work on some solid portion of material already existing. Such time management – a dramaturg cannot appear "too early" or "too late" in the process of creation – may cause the co-authors of the project to fear that they are going to miss the "right" moment. Although, as Lepecki states, it is everyone's hope that dramaturgy will allow for substantive and formal coherence of the performance, almost no one is ready to invite a dramaturg (the author quotes his interlocutors, with the chorus-like "we are not ready" recurring throughout his article). As a result, one could ask whether it is possible at all to prepare for the collaboration with a dramaturg. Is the dramaturgy of a performance solely the result of the dramaturg's involvement? How are the roles of the dramaturg described and how, in the context of various theoretical approaches, is dramaturgy defined in dance performances?

## The choreographer's ally versus the ignorant collaborator

As rightfully noted by Maaike Bleeker (a researcher and a dramaturg),[4] there

are as many types of dramaturgy as there are dramaturgs and their ways of working and establishing relationships with choreographers. (Bleeker, 2015) What is more, every project requires specific methods of cooperation, adjusted to the specific working conditions and possibilities in terms of time and money, so it is difficult to talk about a single concept of dance dramaturgy. However, it is worth recalling a more classical understanding of the roles of the dramaturg and dramaturgy in dance, in order to present other interpretations in its light.

According to Liesbeth Wildschut, who represents both the theoretical and artistic perspective,[5] a dramaturg is "the choreographer's ally in their quest to create a perfect performance." (Wildschut 2013, p. 222) The task of a dramaturg is to search for connections between individual elements of a performance, as well as to stay in touch and mediate between the participants of the project. A dramaturg should participate in all stages of performance production: in the conception stage by asking "checking" questions and offering her or his conclusions to the choreographer "in a clear and inspiring way"; at the rehearsal stage by offering suggestions regarding the structure of the performance; an in the final stage of production and eventual staging of the performance by engaging with the audience. According to Wildschut, the dramaturg can also analyze dance on four levels: 1. the movement of dancers (e.g. muscle tension), 2. the dance composition (e.g. spatial relationships of people and objects, repetitions, expectations of the audience), 3. the relationship between dance and other sign systems (multidisciplinarity), 4. the structure of the performance (transition between scenes, development over time). Despite a number of duties, the dramaturg's work is in fact invisible, because "as a rule, a dramaturg does not make decisions, but ponders, gives advice and offers suggestions." (Wildschut 2013, p. 229) Moreover, dramaturgs are present

only in so far as they are needed by directors/choreographers, and their attitude is characterized by an appropriate amount of distance. First of all, dramaturgs should objectively assess the effects of the creative process: “They describe not what they would like to see or what is not there, but what they see, experience and what associations they have in connection with their observations.” (Wildschut, 2013, p. 232) Wildschut also understands the role of dramaturgs as translators who are “usually a link between the dance team and the outside world,” (Wildschut 2013, p. 233) occupying themselves with various activities: promotional (program notes) and educational activities (contact with the audience, post-performance meetings), as well as with documentation and archiving of the performance, and even fundraising (writing grant applications, obtaining funds and sponsors).

The theory gives rise to an almost utopian environment in the process of creating a dance performance, where the division of roles is evident and clear, the position of the director/choreographer cannot be questioned, and the presence of the dramaturg is only a (rational) guarantee of consistency and coherence among the choreographer’s intuitive choices. Collective effort and collaboration are virtually impossible here, as all responsibility is entrusted solely to the choreographer. Wildschut also states that the professionalization in dance dramaturgy has resulted from the professionalization in theater dramaturgy, and she begins her historical overview of this phenomenon describing its inception in theater (first she mentions the repertoire of Ephraim Lessing, then the text interpretation by Bertolt Brecht, and also Peter Stein who collaborates in a team of dramaturgs). Thus, the author confirms the role of dramaturgs as those who mediate between the sign system and its movement and dance interpretation, and at the same time they safeguard the previously adopted

dramaturgical concept, almost threatening the director/choreographer's freedom of choice (which again may cause them to fear the cooperation with a dramaturg).

Lepecki, mentioned earlier, is opposed to the concept of the dramaturg as a translator of meanings and the "one who should know." In his polemic, he talks about the shift of emphasis in the creation process – what fuels dramaturgy is not so much the desire for knowledge, but rather the power coming "from not knowing" [A.L.] and, as a result, the potentiality of what may happen ("the work-to-come" [A.L]). In this light, dramaturgy is not the traditionally understood negotiation between the text/writing process and the stage movement/action, but the relationship between *knowing* and *owning* – between (not) knowing and (not) claiming authorship,[6] because it is difficult to identify the author of thoughts and associations circulating among all the participants of the creative process. By raising the problem of the relation between dramaturgy–ignorance–wandering, Lepecki emphasizes the meaning of wandering itself: "Wandering, losing trace, wrong calculation. Not knowing where to go next, and going anyway." (Lepecki 2010, p. 194) It is important here to make a distinction – wandering is not the same as the aesthetics of failure, it is rather an exploration of the state of ignorance, allowing for erroneous thinking processes, making unsuccessful attempts and further wandering, and as a result, creating collectively a type of dramaturgy that also does not lead to unambiguous solutions ("dramaturgy that does not know" [A.L.]). Its task is to bring out the tension between many possibilities: (wrong) ways of thinking allowed in the course of work and possible processes of their corporeal adjusting and embodying. (Lepecki 2010, p. 186) Wandering may, among other things, take place at the level of the texts used in the work, but dramaturgy is not limited to the correct interpretation of those texts. It is the reading error that can reveal

the valuable meanings and senses hidden in the “right” interpretations.

The dramaturg’s task is even to sabotage the accepted ways of working and thinking, to mislead, advise inappropriately – this is the only chance to avoid linguistic clichés. Therefore, the dramaturg is not someone who enters the creative process with a ready-made theory or knowledge, but rather someone who sabotages this kind of thinking, who is in a way acting on behalf of the work itself, “a piece of itself” [A.L.] (also, the dramaturg does not respond to some pre-existing needs, but rather to the needs that result from the actions taken). This changes the nature of the dramaturg's job – carried out not for the choreographer or the team, but for “the performance itself”, even if no one knows yet what the performance is supposed to be about. The dramaturg unearths (and puts into practice) the performative force (“authorial force” [A.L.]) of the performance (“work-to-come” [A.L.]), the performance’s longing to be realized, the commands and desires that come from within the performance. Paradoxically, then, the “ignorant” dramaturgs do not pose any threat to other collaborators – they will not expose their collaborators’ ignorance, they will not evaluate the implementation of initially adopted concepts. It is not necessary to prepare for the dramaturg’s presence, rather one only needs to be ready to wander together and to often make wrong choices together. It is the affectivity and the “work of errancy” [A.L.] that carry the performative potential of extracting the work from mental clichés.

## Ignorant friend instead of an “outside eye”

According to Bojana Cvejić,[7] who works in the field of performance theory and practice, dramaturgy is not necessary in dance production and practice.[8] Otherwise, the function of such a pragmatic dramaturgy would only be to

control the methods adopted or the effectiveness of the actions taken. Then the dramaturgy would be the effect of orienting the efforts towards the result or towards the necessity to adhere to some previously established assumptions, which stands in contradiction both with modern methods of work (which see creation as a process, not as a result) and with the role of the dramaturg. The dramaturg "does not enter the creative process solely because there is need to employ one," i.e. there is a requirement to hire another associate. On the contrary, the presence of the dramaturg who is the "co-creator of the problem" (Cvejić, 2010)[9] is to guarantee an experiment rather than a compromise, the creation of a new language instead of resorting to an existing one, and not the control or supervision of the assumed workflow.

Also, the role of the dramaturg is not to translate and mediate between the artists and the audience. What for Wildschut was the communication between the "language of performance" and the outside world, for Cvejić is a kind of theatrical pedagogy that does not belong to the competence of the dramaturg. Moreover, the dramaturg is entangled in the network of relations linking the methods of production, the ways of exchanging the results of artistic work, the producers and the audience; hence the interaction must not be limited to the dissemination of (objective and pre-existing) meanings between the two parties – the creators and the audience, because many more parties and factors are involved in the process.

Similarly, the relationship of the dramaturg and the choreographer, as presented by Wildschut, consisting in rationalizing the choreographer's intuitive choices, becomes problematized by Cvejić. Although she claims that it is required of the dramaturg to possess linguistic and literary skills, she also exposes the division of labor between the two figures: the

choreographer who “thinks with the body” and the dramaturg who conceptualizes ideas through language and is somehow disconnected from bodily experience (and yet the dramaturg *is* close to the process and experiences its successive stages). Cvejić is also opposed to the concept of the critical “outside eye”, meaning that the role of the dramaturg is to look at the effects of artists’ work objectively, because she or he is distant from the creative process and relations with artists. The line separating performers and observers also becomes blurred when other collaborators become observers, even temporarily, negotiating their roles and institutionally imposed divisions, which either distance or involve participants. A choreographer, a dancer or a dramaturg can occupy the position of an “outside eye”, thus testing out a variety of perspectives. The anachronistic notions of objectivity and distance are abolished; dramaturgs are in a close relationship with their colleagues. They are allies in experimentation, enemies in the pursuit of complementarity and unambiguity – a dramaturg is “the friend of a problem.” (Cvejić 2010)

This close relationship is based on ignorance and the “production of problems” in a given context, not on referring to previously formulated concepts or asking rhetorical questions. The attitude of ignorance is understood here similarly as in the case of Lepecki – as welcoming one’s own ignorance (unprejudiced by expectations) and as an openness to potential experimentation (“dramaturgy in experiment”; Cvejić 2010). Let us imagine, says Cvejić, the dramaturg and the choreographer reading a book together written in a language they both don’t know. They would have to “rewrite” it together into new codes and meanings. Dramaturgy is therefore a constant collective speculation about possible situations, about the language used to describe those situations, about points of view, influences and factors determining the creation process – it a production of problems. Colleagues,

“friends of problems”, are also aware of the shared responsibility and the affective impact of decisions made in the process – beyond the “here and now” of the performance.

Almost every theory describing the possible scope of the dramaturg’s activities, attempts to justify the fear of collaborating with one. Cvejić justifies this fear with the multitude of functions performed by dramaturgs and the fact that they transfer ideas and stage concepts to other discursive practices: they cultivate knowledge, journalism, as well as the academic, educational or curatorial work. Additionally, Cvejić often asks questions about professional ethics and the authorship of original concepts (Who would then be the author?). However, an argument in defense of Cvejić’s approach is the specificity of the dramaturg’s work – it is a job that combines many different jobs, and doing the job well requires constant mobility. There seems to be a threat, however, in approaching dramaturgy as if it was a new doxa and employing a dramaturg who is “trained in various discourses” in order to guarantee an interdisciplinary approach to the work, the use of post-structural philosophies and post-dramatic theories. In this perspective, the dramaturg becomes a coach giving advice on how to make performances, who possesses a sort of know-how and only applies it to subsequent projects.

The theorist and dramaturg Bojana Bauer,[10] in turn, claims that the possible fear of collaborating with dramaturgs comes from the fact that they may “bring things closer” too early by naming them;[11] limiting non-verbal communication, trying to verbalize it by means of words and idiomatic expressions, “fixing” what escapes definitions, and as a result limiting the potential multiplicity of meanings. Katherine Profeta, a longtime dramaturg in Ralph Lemon’s projects,[12] points out, however, that the awareness of the

“reducing power” of naming can go hand in hand with the potential of transforming the language (see: Profeta 2015, p. 26). The transformation can take place, according to Profeta, at the level of (in)visibility – something that “has always been there”, something invisible or unnoticed so far, can become visible in the process of searching for its cause and name. This kind of thinking, however, is a consequence of assuming the primacy of the word over movement and action – hence fear would result from the awareness of the performative power of the act of naming.

## Dramaturgical thinking

The category of “dramaturgical thinking” appears relatively often in works on dance dramaturgy. Perhaps it is due to the fact that all participants of the artistic process perform various functions interchangeably, including the function of the dramaturg the responsibilities of whom are not reserved only for one person in the team. “Dramaturgical thinking”[13] consists in performing the artistic work consciously, mapping the results in the network of affects, influences and consequences. Maaike Bleeker expands this category by saying that inviting a dramaturg to join a creative process is tantamount to creating room for dialogue, thinking in motion, allowing interactions to happen between many people. Although she uses an expression borrowed from the linguistic field of sports competition by calling the dramaturg a sparring partner, the relationship between those involved in artistic work (including the dramaturg) is that of friendship and shared mode of thinking. It is the relationship which allows for generating new meanings “among people and between people and objects.” (Bleeker 2015, p. 70) Dramaturgy is therefore not a material practice or a practice rooted in materiality, but the effect of the interaction between many anonymous thoughts (“thinking no-one’s thought”; Bleeker 2015, p. 69). Undermining

the category of authorship and the classic understanding of the dramaturg as the author of the dramaturgical concept, Bleeker claims that the viewer, the recipient, is yet another partner in the process of collective thought creation, engaged in the emergence of meanings.

A new perspective is brought by Bojana Bauer's observation. She claims that dramaturgy is a process of writing and rewriting, and the most substantial portion of that process is producing the memory of the performance. Going beyond the oversimplified dichotomy: the experiencing subject (the performer, choreographer, dancer) versus the knowing subject (the dramaturg), therefore, going beyond the interpretation of dramaturgy as the negotiation between practice and theory, she argues that the dramaturg is "also an acting subject", and the area of the dramaturg's activity is the memory of the performance. The dramaturg tracks the connections between "the material and the way it is remembered, reactivated or transformed." (Bauer 2015, p. 41) While remaining in the relation of closeness to other participants of the creative process, the dramaturg creates opportunities for conversations and interventions that "pause" the action and subject it to reflection. By way of asking questions about the production of meanings and affects, and positioning, in a way, some completed portion of work, the dramaturge "records" the memory of what happens (keeps a "scored memory of the process", p. 42). As Bauer says, it is the "scored memory" that makes the final result possible, and in effect it also justifies the presentation of that result on stage – through dramaturgical awareness of the problems with which the memory can enter into dialogue both within and outside the performance.

# Production of words in dance

Dance dramaturgy is considered by many theoreticians as a practice and profession that emerged in European dance in the nineties of the last century. Dramaturgy is most often defined in the professional context, as a profession, i.e. a project-based economical work of freelancers (Bauer 2015). Changes in artistic production go hand in hand with the growing popularity of the profession of the dramaturg, and it is related to the institutional requirement of producing words at every stage of artistic work. The dramaturg becomes more and more "needed", contrary to what Cvejić said about the non-pragmatic function of dramaturgy. Indeed, dance has to communicate itself better and better – through research projects, descriptions, grant applications, reviews, and conversations with artists and viewers. Also, the institutional requirements for the coordination of educational or artistic research expand the scope of theoretical reflection, description, and analysis, while grant regulations impose describing art in terms of projects – from the stage of preparation, through implementation, to the evaluation of the assumed goals and results. The focus on language, self-awareness and self-definition of dance activities by their creators in the process of artistic production – and thus, turning towards the non-material side of the performance production – create another opportunity for the dramaturg who becomes increasingly concerned with producing knowledge about a given project (even if the dramaturg is an "ignorant collaborator", as postulated by Lepecki). The dramaturg, resorting to Bauer's observation, becomes an increasingly desirable, "creatively productive subject of knowledge" (Bauer 2015, p. 38).

Despite the popularity of the phenomenon of dramaturgy, to which many conferences and publications have been devoted,[14] and the growing role of

the dramaturg in the process of artistic creation, the value of text and words in contemporary performative practices, especially in dance and choreography, still remains underestimated. The ephemeral nature of scenarios and other text materials means that they do not exist in the popular-scientific mainstream. However, undoubtedly, more and more artists use dramaturgic strategies in which the word – written and spoken – plays an important role. Both movement techniques based on words (e.g. *logomotion*)[15] and the popular strategy of self-critical artistic expression (of the *performance lecture* type) are interesting. In a situation where the opposition of movement – word has been abolished, and the self-awareness of dance has increased, the word can also constitute a space of negation – a text from which one is escaping ("escaping language"). After the conceptual turn in dance and choreography, dance became not only a form of (autotelic) theorizing; contemporary choreographers, admittedly, return to the narrative, but in the philosophical context (the work of dance "philosophers") rather than in the theatrical one (presenting the action on stage). The methodology is created each time within a given project by all its participants (including the dramaturg) who describe their own working methods and conceptualize dance. Therefore, the role of text materials, by means of which artists undertake to explain their motivations, make references to inspirations, quotes, contexts, is often of considerable importance. In the case of texts created in the process of producing dance performances, it is crucial whether they are autonomous materials or whether their content affects the reception of the performance; how projects are described in the program materials; what these descriptions do (whether they are announcements, author's commentary, or behind-the-scenes texts). The tension between the curatorial commentary, the description of the performance, and the stage event itself, creates yet another opportunity to

analyze words in dance performances. Such texts also constitute material elements of the memory of the performance, a kind of archive of artistic work. The production of words in dance is also often the best critical strategy in the face of institutional and conventional practices or more traditional ways of interpreting dance.

## “Writing body” against interpretation

There are strategies of “reading dance as text”, in which the reception process consists in decoding symbols and the dancing body becomes an equivalent of a literary character. Such perspective is represented by Mark Franko[16] and his “reading” of the dance-text. In this way Franko decodes signs in 17th-century ballet, all the while being aware that his approach is a historical one. Thus, he deconstructs the Renaissance manifestation of dance as text, where geometric ballets were constructed based on symbols and codes recognizable in the Renaissance culture. While this strategy is close to the semantic one, which examines the relationship between the sign (the dancer’s body) and the extra-linguistic (in this case, external to the stage) reality, the most interesting part seems to be the figure of a “speechless body”, as Frank refers to it, i.e. the body that wants to escape the narrative and narrative reading. This state would be characterized by moments of expression and instability “between” ballet poses, heralding a new era, a manifestation of modernist independence and the liberation of dance from the convention of having to rely on a plot. Moments of flight somehow free the body from symbolism, however, paradoxically, even then it takes part in the process of (scenic) writing (“Flight is part of the writing process”; Profeta 2015, pp. 53-54). The figure of the “speechless body” is thus part of the narrative, from which the body would like to free itself, while at the same time pointing to the paradox of its existence – within the narrative and

thanks to the narrational perception of viewers (Profeta 2015, pp. 53-54). However, it should be remembered that this is a historical strategy of decoding symbols inscribed in dance poses. Today it would be difficult to apply similar categories, especially in contemporary dance. Such “reading” of a dance also creates the risk of over-interpretation, which is pointed out by another researcher, Martin Randy.[17]

Randy disagreed with “the history of the boom and bust” of dance trying to rewrite the American narrative of the dance revolution of the sixties and the fiasco of the eighties (Randy 1996, p. 177), and incorporate in the historical consciousness the revolutionary moments in the development of dance practices of the following years. Revising both the context of artistic innovations and the socio-political conditions of the emergence of dance (especially *the post-modern dance* of the 1960s), he argued that one cannot interpret dance by simply comparing its circumstances to, in a sense, static and unchanging work (on the contrary, it is important to read “the inner movement” of dance). Overinterpretation, according to Randy, creates the risk of reading more “than a dance can bear” (Randy 1996, p. 178) and surrendering to the significant, yet nonetheless paralyzing influence of history, which influences the reception of the latter dance practices – those dated after the dance boom – regardless of their possible breakthrough character and innovative potential. Doing so places dance in the socio-political context and fits dance in the repeated patterns of internal analysis, which, when perpetuated, create a kind of looped discourse.

The question then arises how to talk about choreography in order to avoid overinterpretation, but also “narrativization”, since the choreography itself aims at blurring the plot, escapes linear structures, runs away from history and characters. Choreographer and researcher Susan Leigh Foster[18] is

known for her “dancing” lectures – she talks about choreography, herself being in action, in movement. According to her, the body (the “writing body”), as a specific field of representation, has its own dictionary of meanings, syntactic and paradigmatic tools. Writing (speaking) and dancing are activities that require bodily presence, they both produce signs and meanings, sense and sensuality, and communicate on a verbal and affective level. The functional and productive relationship/mediation between the body that writes and the body that reads always takes place in a specific political and social context. However, the relationship may be temporary, and the message may be ephemeral in nature.[19] Importantly, Foster herself uses the methods she talks about – movement, action, performance – to illustrate her theory. Perhaps it is one of the most effective strategies of talking about dance, rarely used in the context of academic activity, much more often practiced by choreographers and performers.

Referencing examples of artistic work, it is worth recalling Paweł Sakowicz’s *Total*, who even uses the term “text choreography” when talking about this work. (Sakowicz, 2017) In his solo performance, the choreographer experiments with the formula of *performance lecture*, at the same time approaching his lecture on choreography and dance as a kind of artistic manifesto. This is how he begins his performance: “I took the liberty of speculating about virtuosity in dance, since it affects me very much as a dancer.”[20] In his lecture, he refers to his private and professional life, his own ballet education and his knowledge of the ballet vocabulary. In this case, the dramaturgy is stretched between the two activities: speaking and dancing, because Sakowicz consciously combines both activities, conditioning them to function together. Virtuosity in dance is associated with the perfection of performance, with the classical ballet, the mastery of precision and the aesthetics of beauty. However, for this choreographer

virtuosity in dance becomes a subject of research from other perspectives: ecological economy ("virtuoso economy of movement could be understood as a renewable source of body energy"), individual desire and fantasy, and finally, value attributed to a performative act, including a dance presentation. The text "choreographed" by Sakowicz consists of quasi-scientific speculations, "four hypothetical, speculative scenarios which define, stage, give an idea of, and perhaps even lead to possibly performing a virtuoso dance." Perhaps because it is the audience who decides whether the virtuoso dance is to be performed or not in the course of the evening (the performer asks: "Would you like to see me dance?"; In this case, the question determines the subsequent action.). The detail-object, i.e. the notebook he holds in his hands for some time during his lecture, is a symbolic reference to the text that structures the entire event. The material presence of the text is emphasized by the way its delivery is executed (the controlled tone of the speaker's voice, clear diction, unemotional delivery of the text) as well as thanks to the specificity of the solo performance, a kind of a quasi-lecture or an academic presentation. Sakowicz, being also the author of the script,[21] puts his writing practice to the test on the stage. By means of an almost academic narrative, the choreographer/author builds, in the performance, a kind of "dramaturgy of the word" where the (often ironic) relationship of what is said to what is presented is significant. Especially that his speculations refer to consecutive contexts in which a virtuoso dance could potentially be performed – and question the "obvious", and thus often invisible, conditions for the reception of a virtuoso dance, such as the possibility of naming and categorizing it in accordance with some human system of orders. What if, as Sakowicz speculates, the category of humanity, hence also the audience of the performance, did not exist – would it be possible then for virtuosity to manifest itself? If so would it take the form of

eco-virtuosity, or could the very act of existence, the will to survive, be the manifestation of virtuosity? The answer to this question could potentially be affirmative, because, as argued by Sakowicz: “My body is one cell and it is performing a virtuoso survival dance right in front of you.”

## Beyond the word

The word in dance is often used to, paradoxically, activate non-verbal elements of the performance. As Katja Schneider[22] says, dance is the confrontation of the body on stage with other, heteronymous systems of orders (Schneider 2013, p. 117), with various systems of materialization. Lepecki is of a similar opinion when he says that dramaturgy should participate in all actions, not only those produced by the text or in the writing process; also “objects, temperature, time must be taken into account.” Not only, as Lepecki points out, at the poetic and symbolic level, but as a matter of fact that “objects or temperature also work” (Lepecki 2010, p. 194). In a dance performance, all the elements both mean and are part of the performance. One example of such an understanding of dramaturgy – as operations on the non-verbal, but also non-human systems of orders – is the independent work of Agata Siniarska and her concept of “hyperchoreography”, which she understands as the search for choreographic relationships between the animate and inanimate elements of the natural environment, and the inclusion of micro- and macrocosms of human and non-human organisms under the term “choreography”. Siniarska often uses the format of *performance lecture*, she “lays out” her concepts on choreography in her quasi-experiments with the audience.

As she says in *Hyperdances*, “this lecture is a utopia on building a world”[23] in which the coexistence of many bodies “offers the opportunity to work with a

huge number of dancers, in large formats, on large stages.” Siniarska is interested not so much in stage choreography as in the one that takes place with the participation of microorganisms, waves, bacteria, microbes, fluids running in trees – visible and invisible elements of the natural environment. Referring directly to Yvonne Rainer, who gave up dance in favor of film, Siniarska suggests: “yes, dance should be abandoned, but only the dance of human agents.” According to her, Rainer wanted to limit dance to pure movement, but movement is never pure because it is impossible to rid it of overwritten cultural or social inscriptions. Therefore, she proposes to create new relationships; the hyperdance is supposed to offer new possibilities of experiencing movement – in the non-human dimension. Dramaturgy, therefore, is supposed to include here all the actions that occur during the choreographic activity, without focusing on the body of the dancer, usually situated in the center of attention. Halfway through her lecture, Siniarska even leaves the room, her voice still coming out of the speakers. Immediately afterwards, she starts to comment on the view that the audience is looking at – the park or the street, depending on the place of presentation. Thus, she tries to shift the attention away from the dancing body of a subject to the objects left by themselves: plants, grass, pavements, walls and glass (“here is a deanthropocentric dance happening right in front you”; “this dance is sticky, it sticks to us”; “this dance has no center, and no edges either”). The human body is an element of this hyper-collective of forms and movements (“Maybe you feel a strange tingling on your skin? Bacteria? Virus? Radioactive dust? It all runs and jumps here! It all unites us into one collective! It all dances here!”). Although Siniarska emphasizes the potential of “global choreography”, she is aware that the focus still remains on the dancing human body. At the same time, the existence of human body is possible thanks to the developed linguistic categories, thanks to words and

through linguistic experience. The human body also results from collective work, thanks to the circulation of many thoughts and texts (Is this circulation also an element of hyperchoreography?). Siniarska's notes on another performance, *Ślepowidzenie* [Blindsight], seem to confirm this:

> As I write this text, I feel many other texts that have influenced me and what I am writing now. The fact that without them this text would not be what it is. I am not writing it. I give my voice to the collectives of thoughts, ideas, traces, discourses, words, translations… This text is therefore composed of many other texts that were/are important during my work on the performance *Ślepowidzenie* – repeatedly reformulated, sometimes untouched. At the same time, I do not intend to arm them with footnotes – it is more important for me to observe how these texts, their fragments as agents, are active in this text, without referencing their authors. Each solo performance comes to existence the same way this text does. (Siniarska, 2016, p. 98)

## *Feedback*, or the viewer's dramaturgy

In a situation where words increasingly condition artistic production, whereas texts and spoken word become integral part of the structure of dance performances, the questions on how to talk about dance and choreography, what words and languages to use for their description, become more and more significant. This applies to critical texts as well as the effort of the viewers who are engaged in the reception process. The former seems to be indispensable as feedback provided to artists in a formal way, through reviews, reports and interviews, printed or published online,

but the former is also a significant part of the material archive. The latter refers to post-spectacle conversations with authors, feedback sessions organized during presentations of works – they are often ephemeral situations, usually only available to participants of these meetings, rarely recorded and made available to the public. As Liz Lerman,[24] choreographer and creator of the Critical Response, one of the feedback methods, says, feedback sessions not only help artists find new inspirations or develop their existing material (which allows them, above all, to find motivation to continue their work), but also discover the aesthetic and performative potential of the audience. Of course, participation in the feedback process requires viewers to make an effort of participation, however, this is what usually characterizes most artistic events (Kunst 2016, p. 57). The “power of questions” and the joint effort of dialogue open up new areas of interpretation. According to Lerman, feedback is primarily based on communication and involves “all kinds of interpersonal interactions, from coaching to social dialogue, from artistic collaboration to family conversations.” It is important to highlight that Lerman talks of family relationship in the context of an effective method in the field of artistic production, thus assigning value to close relations between colleagues in the process of creation. Feedback is just one of the methods of jointly creating the dramaturgy of the meeting between performers and spectators; it is the collaborative production of meanings (“dramaturgy of collaboration”; Ruhsam, 2010). Closeness here means being active, connecting to meanings that are active in the performance, it is the possibility of negotiating those meanings through expressing one's individual opinion, speaking from one's own perspective; and finally, it is negotiating one’s position. This collaborative work – the joint effort of spectators, choreographers and performers – takes place both at the linguistic and affective-cognitive level;

and words, the questioned definitions and rules, turn out to be crucial in negotiating the terms of that collaboration. In this sense, dramaturgy is not so much an interdependence between elements within a performance or between the word and the movement, but rather it is a dialogue between the participants – creators and spectators, active performers. The performance *Słowa do tańca* [Words for Dancing] by the choreographer Anna Wańtuch is an invitation for the audience to co-create the meeting with the performers,[25] and at the same time a confirmation that the dramaturgy is based on dialogue.

In a small space, the viewer is treated individually, subsequent meetings, intended only for one participant, are held every half an hour. During such a "session", the viewer is faced with the choice between words and their meanings, because Wańtuch asks directly: coffee or tea, nudity or clothing, full or empty, together or separately, quickly or slowly – reacting to each answer on the choreographic level (also, the music then changes its melody and timbre), performing before the viewer (in a close relation to her or him, minimally engaging her or him to make a move, or leaving freedom to just observe the performer's work). It is the viewer who is the dramatist of the whole event, because she or he makes selections and juxtapositions at the level of not only physical actions (the viewer's response always entails a different action of the performer), but most of all, the meanings following from them, the relations constructed *ad hoc* between words, their material sound and the message they carry. Words used for dancing and activating movement also build a space of associations, reminiscences, emotions and affects: "Because to choose a «cat» is to be in one space with a cat, to «dance» with him, whereas to choose a «mother» is to be physically face to face with someone's specifically defined corporeality. Establish a relationship with her. Listen to her «song»." The words here "open and

organize the space between two people", strengthen the relation of mutual influence and closeness, but also enable collaboration between the choreographer and the audience on the dramaturgical level. Just this one example shows that today it is difficult to limit the understanding of dramaturgy to the work of a dramaturg in the process of artistic work. Evidently, dramaturgy can also be described as the viewer's effort undertaken during a meeting with the choreographer/performer, with each individual project requiring specific modes of description. As Sandra Noeth[26] concludes, almost ominously: "the dramaturgy belongs to no one. It is like a monster – a ghost." (Noeth, 2010)

Translated by Lynn Suh

## Author

Karolina Wycisk (office@performat-production.com) – PhD student at the Jagiellonian University, dance critic. Producer and dance manager, she runs performat production (performat-production.com) and promotes female polish choreographers abroad. ORCID: 0000-0002-7318-3683.

## Footnotes

1. Lepecki actually repeats the conclusions of this article in his next article, "Errancy as Work: Seven Strewn Notes for Dance Dramaturgy." [in:] *Dance Dramaturgy. Modes of Agency, Awareness and Engagement*, edited by Pil Hansen, Darcey Callison, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015. However, taking into account their chronology, I decided to quote from the earlier article.
2. In 1992-1998, Lepecki worked as a dramaturg with Meg Stuart, Francisco Camacho, João Fiadeiro and Vera Montero. Lepecki is a performing arts theorist, author of many books and publications, and professor at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University. At the same time, he is a curator of exhibitions and events bordering on performing arts, visual arts and choreography.

3. The quotations from Lepecki's articles which are significant in the opinion of the author of the present article, are left in their original [English] language version [marked with A.L. by the translator when necessary]. The remaining quotations have been translated [from English to Polish] by the author.
4. Professor of the Theater Studies Department at the University of Utrecht, for over fifteen years she worked as a dramaturg with choreographers and directors and led the theater group Het Oranjehotel.
5. Professor of the Theater Studies Department at the University of Utrecht, editor of books in the field of choreography. As a choreographer and dancer, she created dance performances for younger audiences.
6. According to Lepecki, dance entered the theater at a time when he himself was going through the post-dramatic era – hence the dramaturgy of dance uses incoherence and dispersion of elements ("dramaturgy of dispersed atmospheric elements" [A.L.]), because the theater itself has changed its relationship with the text. For this reason, dramaturgy cannot be limited to the correspondence between a word and movement. Lepecki sees the emergence of this phenomenon in the 1980s, when many dramaturgs began working with choreographers, incl. Raymond Hoghe and Pina Bausch, Heidi Gilpin and William Forsythe, Marianne van Kerkhoven and the Flemish choreographers, among them Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker.
7. From 1996, as a dramaturg, she collaborated with, among others, Jan Ritsema, Xavier Le Roy, and Eszter Salamon. Professor of the Philosophy of Art at Singidunum University in Belgrade.
8. Myriam van Imschoot even emphasizes that the professional development of dramaturgy and the position of a dramaturg fulfill the need of an institution rationalizing its practices (quoted from: Bauer 2015; van Imschoot is an artist belonging to the Belgian art scene, co-founder of Sarma, a platform that brings together practitioners and theorists around the most recent issues in choreography and performance). It is important to mention that Cvejić speaks of the independence of a freelance dramaturg, unrelated to the team or institution carrying out the project.
9. Cf. *Choreographing Problems: Expressive Concepts in European Contemporary Dance and Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2015.
10. Performance theorist, teaches Contemporary Dance and Performance at the University of the Arts in Amsterdam. As a dramaturg she worked, among others with Vera Mantero, Latifa Lâabissi and Mário Afonso, and among Polish artists – Renata Piotrowska during her work on *Śmierć. Ćwiczenia i wariacje* [Death. Exercises and Variations], *Ćwiczenia i wariacje* [Exercises and Variations] and *Wycieka ze mnie samo złoto* [The Pure Gold is Seeping out of Me].
11. Bojana Bauer. *Enfolding of Aesthetic Experience: Dramaturgical Practice in Contemporary Dance*, p. 13, quoted after: Profeta 2015.
12. She has been working with a choreographer and a visual artist since 1997; the book quoted in the article talks about that cooperation.
13. Pil Hansen uses the category of "dramaturgical agent", referring not so much to the work of the dramaturg, but to "dramaturgical awareness" based on adopted strategies and principles. (Hansen 1996, p. 124)
14. Cf. *Embodied Dramaturgies*, edited by Jeroen Peeters, Sarma, 2012, available at: http://sarma.be. The anthology contains around thirty texts by dramaturgs (Marianne Van Kerkhoven, André Lepecki, Myriam Van Imschoot, Jeroen Peeters, Igor Dobricic, Sandra

Noeth) and artists (Boris Charmatz, Tim Etchells, Janez Jansa, Jennifer Lacey, Frans Poelstra, Robert Steijn). Other anthologies gather special editions of magazines devoted to dramaturgy ("Theaterschrift" 1993, "Women and Performance" 2003, "Performance Research" 2009, "Maska" [Mask] 2010).
15. An improvisation technique that combines simultaneous "unedited" talking about the action being performed. *Logomotion* was started in the 1980s by Simone Forti, and now it is popularized by Nóra Hajós.
16. Professor at the Theater Arts Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, author of many books on dance. Franko was also a dancer, performing for many years with the NovAntiqua troupe (since 1985).
17. Randy was a professor and lecturer at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and in his work he also drew from his education and experience as a dancer.
18. Author of many books on contemporary dance, especially the history of American dance. Professor at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). I also cite her lectures in the article "Ten performance jest jak…" [This Performance is Like …] op. cit.. The series of three lectures is available online. Cf. Leigh Foster, Susan, op. cit..
19. I wrote about the performances of Paweł Sakowicz's *Total* and Agata Siniarska's *Hyperdances* in the reportage from the Stary Browar Nowy Taniec 2016 [Malta Festival 2016], *Poza wspólnym obszarem?* [Beyond the Common Ground?], taniecPOLSKA.pl, 4/08/2016, available at: http://www.taniecpolska.pl/krytyka/366.
20. All quotes come from the Polish script provided by the author (the English one is being used when Sakowicz performs abroad).
21. During his works on *Total,* Sakowicz did not cooperate with a dramaturg – the work was created as a result of the residency Solo Projekt Plus 2015, organized by Grażyna Kulczyk's Art Stations Foundation. Sakowicz's artistic mentor was then Dalija Aćin Thelander. Working on his next solo production, *Jumpcore*, the choreographer collaborated with Mateusz Szymanówka.
22. She is a researcher and lectures at the Institute of Theater Studies at Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich.
23. All quotes come from the script provided by the author. The lecture premiered as a post-residency presentation as part of the *Let's Dance*exhibition at Stary Browar in Poznań in October 2015, and subsequent shows were possible thanks to the project's tour as part of the program Scena dla Tańca 2017.
24. More information on Critical Response on the website: https://lizlerman.com. All quotes come from that source.
25. A dancer and musician. Music performed by Michał Kiedrowski; the co-author of the concept, author of the script and the director was Maria Kwiecień. It premiered in May 2016 as part of the 37th Stage Song Review at the Capitol Music Theater in Wrocław. The quotes come from the description of the performance available on the website.
26. A dramaturg, curator and lecturer, incl. at HZT Berlin – a school which has provided education to many independent Polish choreographers (Agata Siniarska was mentioned in the article).

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