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Situated in Translations

Cultural Communities and Media Practices

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Introduction

Michaela Ott, Thomas Weber

From our Westernized and globalized cultural perspective and on the basis of our academic and ethical convictions, we would like to demonstrate that the construction of today's cultural communities is not primarily dependent on geographical, ethnic, social, or political attributions, but on aesthetic and media practices that communicate, transmit, and transform mediatized material, and translate it into new contexts of media culture.

Singular differences aside, these practices of translation are, on the one hand, ubiquitous due to the dissolution of borders in a mondialized world and the growing variety of technological configuration, transmission, and storage media; but, on the other hand, they are specifically determined by the distinct way that they are situated within media milieus and specific cultural communities. It is these media milieus and cultural communities that the articles collected here will examine with regard to their respective heterotypical forms of translation, understood as practices of adaptation that amalgamate cultures and transform meaning.

In this sense, translation does not simply occur between two languages or cultural spheres. Instead, it is shaped by a continuous process of cultural and media transformation that takes place between different semiotic registers and "Kultur-techniken" ("cultural techniques"). Within this context, the difference between original and copy seldom plays a significant role, as there is a burgeoning awareness of the fact that all symbolic expression, whether it takes place in language, image, or another sign system, is always mediatized and 'translated' to begin with—that is, it has undergone a process of historical genesis and transformation and therefore demonstrates diachronic, multilayered, and complex structures.

Similarly, translation is an act of 'appropriating' that which is understood as foreign and therefore by an act of adaption, but also by an act of self-attribution that shapes and expresses the way a community sees itself. In particular, it is today's hybrid mediatizations and composite-cultural products that make translation a procedure that tendentially cannot be brought to an end. Analyzing the traces of this procedure reveals the ambiguous situatedness and historic cultural contingency of expression, which frequently evolves locally and then diversifies mundially.

And so you see ...

On the Situatedness of Translating Audience Perceptions

Gabriele Klein, Marc Wagenbach

1. INTRODUCTION

This text's guiding premise is that translation is a situational and situated praxis. Both the 'situational'—in terms of something momentary, performatively generated, ephemeral, always absent—and 'situatedness'—i.e., context, embeddedness, framing—are constitutive for translation. Translation thus takes place as an ensemble of practices that resituate and generate the configuration of subjects, media, artefacts, and techniques differently in relation to the situation. Using choreographer Robyn Orlin's piece *And so you see...* as an example, we want to examine the situationality and situatedness of cultural, medial, and material acts of translation in a specific piece of choreography and in the way it is perceived.

Robyn Orlin is a white South African, born in Johannesburg to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. She studied dance at the Contemporary Dance School in London, UK, and visual art in Chicago, USA. She is married to a South African of German descent, who she has been living with in Berlin since 2001, together with their adopted daughter of color from South Africa. Orlin has been working as a choreographer since 1986 and is thus part of the first generation of African choreographers to search for 'contemporary' forms of expression. In 1999, she celebrated her international breakthrough with the piece *Daddy, I've seen this piece six times before and I still don't know why they're hurting each other...*¹ Orlin's works focus on postcolonial issues, usually combined with gender topics,¹ which she presents and artistically explores against the backdrop of South Africa's (post-) apartheid society, which she left in 2001. Her biography, which features a generally hybrid identity as well as several instances where she transgressed biographical and cultural limitations, already demonstrates various steps of translation between

1 | For example, *Ski-Fi-Jenny and the Frock of the New* (2002), which deals with drag queens and the myth of Iphigenia.

the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. It also opens up a distinct field of inquiry, which fundamentally characterizes Orlin’s choreographies.

Like the works of many internationally active choreographers, Robyn Orlin’s artistic work also features various, aesthetically interwoven processes of translation. On the one hand, her pieces² involve acts of cultural translation: while largely performed for European audiences, they nevertheless negotiate topics of South African society, especially questions of racism and (post-)colonial power. And, moreover, in her artistic projects, she mostly collaborates with dancers and performers who come from formerly colonial or colonized countries. Thus, they bring with them various biographical, cultural, and social experiences, which in turn engage in dialogue with one another during the rehearsal process. Orlin’s pieces are furthermore characterized by the way that they translate material, inasmuch as they not only feature a lavish use of objects, things, and artefacts, but also draw these materials from different cultures and dramaturgically situate them in relationships of varying intensity. Last but not least, her pieces feature multiple translations of media, as can be seen in their use of video installations and thus in the way that they translate between different medialities: the theatricality of the stage situation, the presence of the performers, and the co-presence of the spectators on the one hand, and the mediality of the image and video installations, and projections on the other hand.

In philosophy and art theory (Rancière 2010; Bourriaud 1998), but also in dance and theater studies, even before the concept of the ‘artistic body of work’ came under attack and processual approaches to artistic development and reception began gaining in significance, the realization had begun spreading that spectators are of particular importance for the architecture of a piece (Whalley/Miller 2017; Harpin/Nicholson 2017). This realization has also affected the academic analysis of theater and dance. Weiler/Roselt (2017) have shown that non-participatory observation, a method long established in qualitative social research, can be sensibly applied to performance analysis in order to accommodate audience perspectives.

In this text, we will broaden the strict theater studies approach suggested by Weiler/Roselt to include intersectional methodology. We will thereby compensate for the fact that their method does not take into account nor incorporate into its methodical considerations the further developments that have taken place in qualitative research, such as praxis theory and ethnomethodology. “Praxeological production analysis” (Klein 2015) combines ethnomethodological methods with performance analysis. Orlin’s solo piece *And so you see... our honourable blue sky and ever enduring sun... can only be consumed slice by slice...*³ from 2016,

2 | <http://www.robynorlin.com> (accessed: February 28, 2018).

3 | Concept/choreography: Robyn Orlin, dance: Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza, costumes: Marianne Fassler, lighting: Laïs Foulc, Technical Director: Thabo Pule, administration and production: Damien Valette, assistance and coordination: Marion Paul; production: City Theater & Dance

developed in collaboration with South African performer Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza, will serve as an example for us to expound our hypothesis that performance pieces are (also) created by the perceptions of the audience. We will describe the way the audience perceives two distinct scenes and then use these scenes to delineate the central topics of the piece. This process not only allows us to focus on artistic practices of cultural, medial, and material translation, but simultaneously also gives us the chance to reflect—in a two-fold sense—upon practices of academic translation. These are, on the one hand, practices of transcribing aesthetic perception into written artefacts and thus into ‘data’ and, on the other, the academic practices of interpreting and analyzing this same data. Our data pool will consist of observation logs.

We will first outline the methodical basis of the praxeological approach, then introduce the academic translations—starting with the descriptions in the observation logs and then in the form of a “thick description” (Geertz 1973). The exemplary basis is therefore the analysis of two scenes from Orlin’s piece, which received particular mention in the observation logs. In the two last sections, we will relate these descriptions to one another and reflect on them as practices of academic translation.

2. ON THE SITUATEDNESS OF ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE AND ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Dance research on the one hand and social research on the other have developed different understandings of ‘situativity’ and ‘situatedness’: in the case of dance and performance, the situational commonly stands for the momentary, the unrepeatable, the irretrievable, and the ephemeral, that which is always already absent in its moment of appearance. It is not embeddedness within a situation, but rather the non-availability of the situational, its non-graspability, that which cannot be categorized and which predominates here. Accordingly, the situational poses a number of epistemological problems, such as permanent absence (Siegmond 2006) and that which is consistently non-present, which can only be grasped via “presence effects” (Gumbrecht 2004), i.e., that which can never be directly observed. Also neglected here are the framings of the situational, be they social or cultural, based on knowledge systems and bodies of knowledge, or spectators’ viewing experiences. However, sociological praxis theory considers the situational itself to be socially structured, i.e., permeated by patterns of the social. It emphasizes that situatedness, i.e., that which embeds and frames, is what constitutes the situation.

Group, Damien Valette, co-producers: Festival Montpellier Danse 2016, Festival d’Automne à Paris, Kinneksbond, Centre Culturel Mamer, Luxembourg, Centre Dramatique National de Haute-Normandie, la Ferme du Buisson, Scène Nationale de Marne-la-Vallée, supported by Arcadi Ile-de-France. World premiere: Théâtre de la Bastille, Festival d’Automne Paris, September 14, 2016.

Accordingly, the basic assumption of praxis theory is that practices reveal themselves in their situatedness. Thus, the momentary, ephemeral, performative can only be observed precisely because of its situatedness in the practice.

Although praxis-theoretical approaches (Hirschauer 2004; Reckwitz 2003; Schmidt 2012; Schatzki/Knorr-Cetina/Von Savigny 2001; Kalthoff/Hirschauer/Lindemann 2008; Shove/Pantzar/Watson 2012; and others) differ in detail (Klein/Göbel 2017), the basic presuppositions of praxeological research, as translated to dance and performance research, can be summarized as follows (Klein 2014): a praxis-theoretical perspective does not primarily examine ideas, values, norms, the semiotic and symbolic systems of dances, scenes, or choreographies, but rather attempts to locate them in practices, i.e., in their situatedness. In doing so, this approach focuses on the material entrenchment of ideas, values, norms, and semiotic and symbolic systems in human bodies, but also in things and artefacts (e.g., in spaces, materials, props, sets, costumes). In addition, praxis-theoretical analysis does not use methods that analyze productions in terms of their choreographic structure, i.e., the narrative or the intention of the artists. Instead, its performance analysis takes into account the singularity of every single performance in terms of its temporal and spatial contingency. Moreover, it applies an intersectional approach by including and understanding audience perceptions with the help of ethnographical methodologies. In this respect, praxeological production analysis can be considered a mixture of methodologies from praxis theories and performance analysis techniques, combining the methods of performance analysis used in theater studies with the qualitative research methods of social science.

A praxeological perspective is thus not primarily interested in analyzing the intentions and motifs of choreographers. Instead, it concentrates on activities, actions, performative acts, and configurations on stage. However, this perspective does not focus on the movements of individual actors, but rather on various observable interdependent activities, which cannot be traced back to individual motifs or intentions. Instead, choreography here is understood as embodied, materially conveyed performance, organized by collectively shared, practical forms of knowledge. Choreography and dance practices should therefore be understood as a bundle of physical and mental activities, whereby the assumption is that practices register, ratify, confirm, and make mental acts visible.

A praxeological perspective thus concentrates on the act of *doing* and thus also always on the performative dimensions, i.e., the ways *in which* a performance takes place—in other words: *how* the performance is executed and *how* individual ‘scenes’ are performed. The praxeological focus lies not on whether an idea or a narrative, i.e., a connotation, is perceived in ways that the choreographer intended, but on what actually happens during a performance and how this is perceived and in turn authenticated by the audience. Simply put: a praxeological perspective is interested in *how* cultural, material, and medial translations are situationally performed and perceived by the audience. Praxeological research thus means adopt-

ing a research position that takes an open approach of inquiry and uses methods that can record both the performative execution as well as the audience’s perception and authentication of the performance.

Part of the process of praxeological production analysis is non-participatory observation, which translates the aesthetic experience of a ‘piece’ into writing, thus rendering it as ‘data’ (Schäfer/Schindler 2017). Observation logs (Brüsemeister 2008) provide a methodological tool that can be used to understand that which is “basically incomprehensible” (Hirschauer 2006: 424) about what is being observed. As in other academic methods, observation logs may not be able to capture the ‘piece’ as a whole, since they are characterized by being incomplete, imperfect. Thus, they also always testify to the blanks in perception and memory and document what was not translated or maybe cannot even be translated into language and writing. But even when transcriptions constitute a linguistic reduction of the aesthetic complexity and polyvalence of perceived material, what has been translated into writing should not merely be considered incomplete residue, as Reichertz argues (Reichertz 2014). Instead, the act of translating into writing is productive in its right (Klein/Leopold/Wieczorek 2018). It produces new contexts, which enable further reflection upon the perceived ‘piece’. Observation logs resituate the piece anew, insofar as new readings open up in and through translation:

In a similar fashion, ethnographic observers have to transform whatever they perceive through their senses (what ears and eyes “tell us”) into speech—a completely different form of signification. This process is reinforced when verbalization takes the shape of the *written* because the urge to put something down has an interesting impact on perception. On the one hand, together with the already mentioned mnemonic state of consciousness, it supports the objectivation of the perceived. Just as novelists register their lives as subject-matter or photographers use their environment as their “subject”, ethnographers who are compelled to write view their field as empirical “material.” On the other hand, already crafted protocols provide a template for further observations: they structure and focus whatever is observed during the next day. The categories used have already conceptually decomposed the *gestalt* of impressions and memories or the sense synesthesias. The “verbatim” of the spoken and the “literality” of the written create an analytic relationship to one’s own sense perceptions. (Hirschauer 2006: 428)

In this sense, it is precisely this very corpus of data that emphasizes new contexts. These observation logs with their heterogeneous practices of textualization, reflecting the socio-cultural differences of their writers—i.e., their age, gender, social status, cultural knowledge—as well as their respective practices of transcription, reveal differences, but also structural similarities and patterns of perception. Ludwig Jäger describes this process of transcription as “reframing” (Jäger

2013: 79). For unlike the use of the term “transcription”⁴ in music ethnology and linguistics, which Jäger accuses of understanding transcription as the “translation of performative, transitory events into static, scriptural notation systems” (Jäger 2012: 306), he sees in transcription a “logic of disruption” (Jäger 2013: 83) that reveals itself in permanent “remediations, reframings and reconceptualisations of cultural semantics” (Jäger 2013: 83).⁵

What follows from these considerations is that the “logic of disruption” is also visible in the methodological tool of the observation log: logbooks are remediatizations of perception, reframed into writing and reconceptualized within academic contexts. They resituate the piece and constitute a body of data that can be used to reflect upon the situational performance event. This reflection produces context, creates a new approach to what was perceived, and facilitates alternative interpretations of the performed choreography. From this perspective, observation logs can therefore be understood as data that demarcates a playing field of contradictions, blanks, and incomplete spaces (Jäger 2012: 306). In this sense, observation logs are tools that can be used to translate something that has passed, something that exists as no more than a trace. Observation logs will therefore never be able to represent more than an approximation of what has passed. But they do help to prevent the past from freezing into a single state, instead comprehending it as something mobile, transitory, dependent on the respective situational framing, the situative interpretative context. Moreover, as a result of their fragmentary and selective nature, they reference the situational contextuality of the performance. Finally, due to the heterogeneity of transcription, they provide a starting point for further interpretation, which not only documents differences in the way a piece is perceived, but also records similarities, thus producing a “thick description” (Geertz 1973) of the piece, as will now be presented in the following section.

3. THE “LOGIC OF DISRUPTION”: PRACTICES OF TRANSLATING ‘GENDER’ AND ‘RACE’

Our body of data is made up of twenty-eight observation logs dealing with Orlin’s piece *And so you see... our honourable blue sky and ever enduring sun... can only be consumed slice by slice...*. Twenty-five of them are based on a video recording

4 | In the context of media studies, ‘transcription’ is defined as a group of methods that significantly determine the operational mode of communicative media—the scriptural as well as the pictorial, the analogue as well as the digital—in the semantic household of cultures. Medial methods of this type are ‘transcriptive’ inasmuch as they yield moments in which meaning is generated as intramedial and intermedial references made by signs to other signs, or rather by media to other media (Jäger 2012: 309).

5 | Translation by Elena Polzer.

of the piece (1:06:36 min) by Eric Legay from the year 2016. The logs were written by master’s students studying Performance Studies at Hamburg University on October 26, 2017, directly after viewing the video recording. Like the other three logs written directly after live performances, the students had thirty minutes to note down their observations.⁶ Two observation logs were written after the performance of the piece on September 28, 2017, at Depot 2 in Cologne, Germany, while one log was noted after a performance of the piece in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, on July 4, 2017. We thus have a body of data that is heterogeneous inasmuch as it can be attributed to various performances of the piece in different cultural and situational contexts, as well as one video recording. Moreover, the logs were written in German and English, as the students came from different international backgrounds.

This heterogeneity of the data corpus allows us to reflect on the question of whether the theatrical performance and the co-presence of the spectators create a more differentiated perception of the piece than a video performance, which already guides the spectator’s perception via camera focus, editing, lighting, etc. Based on the body of data at hand, this is not the case. Instead, the analysis of the logs illustrates that all of the writers were to some degree experienced viewers in the field of dance and choreography and that this expertise intrinsically influenced their descriptions in the form of embodied knowledge.

In the following, we will condense the descriptions of two scenes that almost all of the logs attributed importance to and described in great detail: the ‘oranges scene’ and the ‘Putin scene.’⁷ This process will also reveal similarities and differences in the transcriptions. Finally, we will attempt to interpret each of the scenes with the help of a scene analysis of the video recording.

Both the descriptions in the logs and our own interpretations strongly feature the categories of ‘gender’ and ‘race.’ Both categories are central in this piece, as they are in Orlin’s artistic work in general. As mentioned above, this is most likely due to her biography as a white artist born in South Africa, but also her political attitude as an artist and her position in a contemporary art market oriented toward

6 | The aim of the observation logs was explained beforehand and made available to the students in writing using the following words: “The goal is for you to exactly describe what you see. No analysis, no interpretation. Descriptions may also include your position, i.e., describing the effect that something has on you, what you feel. You can hand in the paper anonymously or with your name—as you wish. We will scan all descriptions so that all participants in the seminar can have a copy.” (Klein: unpublished seminar text October 26, 2017)

7 | Compiling the logs revealed what we describe as the ‘Putin scene’ (twenty-five logs describe this scene, three do not) and the ‘oranges scene’ (twenty-three texts mention this scene, five do not) to be particularly noteworthy. The ‘oranges scene’ begins in the video recording of the piece at 14:00 min, at the point at which the music sets in, and lasts until 20:03 min; the ‘Putin scene’ begins at 42:23 min, when the music sets in, and lasts until 47:00 min.

generating attention, in which she and others label her work a “permanent irritation.”⁸

We will examine the way that ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are aesthetically translated in the perceptions of both the choreographic configurations and the interactions that took place between performers, artefacts, music, stage elements, and technological media. Our theory is that the performative interactions delineated in the logs constantly resituate an ambivalent playing field of tensions constituted by sex and violence, (post-)colonial power, and economic greed.

3.1 The ‘oranges scene’

3.1.1 Condensing the logs into a thick description: translations of ‘gender’ and ‘race’ as sex and violence

The performer’s head is entirely swathed in translucent plastic wrap, leaving only the performer’s hair, mouth and nostrils exposed. It is not entirely clear if the person is a man, a woman, or otherwise, as no visible physical features point to a gender.⁹ He/she is sitting with his/her back to the audience on an old armchair, which is facing backward at the center of the stage’s edge. He/she has a large metal cowbell around his/her neck. Toward the back of the stage, we see a man sitting behind a camera; he is filming the performer. It is not clear whether he is a technician or a performer. Both are dark-skinned, but unlike the person at the back, the gender identity of the performer in front is unclear. The performer’s image is projected live onto a screen that covers the entire back wall of the stage. With his/her left hand, the performer pulls out a bowl of oranges and a large butcher’s knife. He/she is sitting on a white sheet covering the armchair and is wrapped in plastic wrap from the feet upward. Only his/her hands, arms, feet, and mouth are left uncovered. The hair on the sides of his/her head has been shorn. We see a heavy, black body in white underpants beneath plastic wrap that covers his/her entire body.

The performer sings, screams a song in an African language. When he/she moves forward, we hear the clang of the cowbell hanging around his/her neck. He/she takes a large butcher’s knife in his/her left hand and begins peeling an orange. This action is projected onto the screen at the back. Classical music sets in¹⁰—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Requiem*, his last unfinished composition from

8 | Cf. e.g.: <http://fta.ca/en/archive/beauty-remained-for-just-a-moment-then-returned-gently-to-her-starting-position/>; <https://www.southafricanculturalobservatory.co.za/article/robyn-orlin-returns-to-sa-with-new-dance>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/12/arts/dance/12orlin.html> (accessed February 26, 2018).

9 | In the logs, the performer is not explicitly described as male in the beginning. However, some writers formulated their insecurity about the non-visibility of physical gender markers.

10 | Only three writers identified the “classical music” as Mozart’s *Requiem*.

1791, is a seminal masterpiece of European classical music and is now considered one of his most popular works.

The performer cuts the orange into individual sections, which he/she skewers with the tip of the knife. He/she raises the orange pieces to his/her mouth with relish. We see this projected onto the back screen in real time in a close-up. These actions are enhanced by the sounds he/she makes: he/she squeals and makes sounds of pleasure. He/she laughs. A high-pitched male voice can be heard singing in the music as the performer dangerously plays around with the knife in his/her mouth. He/she turns and twists the cutting edge and we see his/her face and open mouth up close on the screen behind him/her. He/she could hurt him/herself. He/she sticks the knife deeper and deeper into his/her mouth. Just as he/she licks the knife, we hear a female alto voice enter in the music. He/she imitates the female voice, squeaking, howling, and moving the knife faster and faster around in his/her mouth. He/she laughs. He/she takes a new orange and bites into it. He/she swallows the orange—peel and all. The juices drip onto his/her body. He/she chews, smacks his/her lips, and savors the taste. We hear female and male voices singing together. One after the other, he/she stuffs several oranges into his/her mouth. The music ends. We hear the audience clapping.¹¹ Then the performer makes an arm movement of thanks to the audience, an orange still in his/her mouth, while making grunting noises.

Classical music starts up again (a subsequent section of Mozart’s *Requiem*). The performer’s body is still wrapped in plastic. He/she takes a new orange in his/her left hand and stabs the orange multiple times with the knife, which he/she is holding in his/her right hand. He/she squeezes out the juice and lets it drip onto his/her body and face. He/she falls onto an armchair standing at the center of the front edge of the stage. The juices run under the plastic wrap. A camera above the stage projects a bird’s-eye-view image of the performer’s entire body lying on the armchair onto the back screen, thus duplicating and reinforcing it. The performer violently rips apart an orange with his/her teeth, crushes it, squashes it. His/her mouth is full of oranges. He/she puts the rinds aside and takes a new orange into his/her right hand, stands up, and stabs the orange with the knife in his/her left hand.

The orange juice drips onto his/her body and the plastic wrap. He/she throws the oranges onto the floor and cuts open the plastic wrap using the butcher’s knife. Now, the performer’s body becomes visible: his beefy chest, his belly, and his thighs. We hear classical music (Mozart’s *Requiem*) and the performer grunting. Synchronized with his actions, we see the carcass of a cow being slit open and a large butcher’s knife on the back screen. Then we see a heavy, black, sweaty body

11 | The logs describing the scene as seen in the video documentation remain unclear as to whether the audience clapping was recorded or actually a spontaneous act of the attending audience. An analysis of the logs witnessing the live performances revealed that the applause came from a tape recording.

in close-up. He cuts the plastic wrap open at his loins, so that his male genitals become visible under the fabric of his white underpants. He removes the rest of the plastic wrap from his face. The music stops. The orange remnants are still in his mouth. Toward the end of the 'oranges scene,' the sweaty face of a man, whose gender could not be clearly identified at the beginning of the scene, comes into focus, with angry brown eyes in close-up, his mouth still filled with oranges.

3.1.2 Analysis of the logs: the production and framing of sexual desire and colonial violence

The following analysis focuses first on what was translated into language (eating the oranges) and then on what was not translated (Mozart's *Requiem*) to demonstrate how the narrative of the scene was perceived as a fusion of sexual desire and colonial violence, in spite of a lack of knowledge or information about Mozart's *Requiem* being a central element of the scene.

3.1.2.1 What was translated: eating oranges at the crossroads of desire and sexual violence

The ways in which the observation logs frame the act of eating the oranges, tend to contextualize it in terms of desire and violence: "The next image shows the performer peeling oranges with a knife and eating them 'with relish.' This escalates until the performer is basically rubbing the oranges that he is crushing all over himself." (Log 17)¹² Another log does not explicitly speak of oranges; it merely describes the scene as a "feeding frenzy" (log 8), but it does very clearly associate it with pleasure and violence:

With gusto and a tender noise, the performer peels fruit with a knife, ending in a feeding frenzy. These elements produced in me an ambivalent feeling between pleasure and violence. On the one hand, the juicy fruit, on the other, the sharp dangerous knife, pulled through the lips. (Log 8)¹³

It is worth noting that, in spite of the transcriptions' heterogeneity, almost all writers mentioned the appearance of sex and violence in this scene: aside from direct references to the terms 'violence' and 'sex,' the writers translated their perceptions into texts with a striking, almost sexist choice of words ("licks the knife") and indifferent gender attributes ("he/she") as exemplified in the following: "He licks the knife several times. She eats the orange with relish." (Log 19)¹⁴

How are desire and sexual violence, as documented in the observation logs and as experienced by the spectators, performatively generated in this scene? Taken together, the logs trace a dramaturgy that develops from the sensual enjoyment of

12 | Translated from the German by Elena Polzer.

13 | Translated from the German by Elena Polzer.

14 | Translated from the German by Elena Polzer.



Photo 01: Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza © Jérôme Séron

orange slices into a voracious and obsessive act of devouring, stuffing into one's mouth, and violent penetration of individual oranges. The performer concentrates on his own pleasure, while the objects in use (the oranges and the butcher's knife) carry antagonistic connotations: oranges suggest flesh, vitamins, health, softness, naturalness, organic matter, color, freshness, life; whereas the butcher's knife suggests danger, risk, injury, death, metal, hardness, steel, inorganic matter. The choreographic configuration of the objects alone creates a field of tension that demonstrates the dialectics of pleasure and destruction.

This tension is not only created by the antagonistic objects (the oranges and the butcher's knife), but also in the way that they are handled, in a linear dramaturgical escalation of the components of time, space, and intensity, charting a curve from pleasure to destruction. This dramaturgical progression of events generates different modes of pleasure, which reveal themselves both in the manner in which the oranges are eaten as well as in the use of the knife. The interactions on stage and translated into writing in the observation logs—the acts of devouring, rending, and crushing the orange peels, and the biting, squashing, and eating of the flesh, as well as the piercing and perforating of the orange—produce complex sexual connotations that oscillate between desire and pleasure on the one hand and sexual violence on the other. Desire and domination, devotion and submission, victim and perpetrator, servant and master are closely intertwined here. It is the performance of ambivalent practices of pleasure, which create variants of self-empowerment that range from a sensual act or compulsive obsession to a focus on destroying the object of desire. They produce a tension that oscillates between appropriating the

object of desire and simultaneously being imprisoned by one's own sexual needs and quest for satisfaction.

3.1.2.2 What was not translated: Mozart's *Requiem* as a colonial framing of desire and violence

While the observation logs aptly note the connotations of sex and violence in the treatment of the oranges, their linguistic translations of both the 'oranges scene' and the 'Putin scene' hardly mention the music being used. When it does appear, it is only generally described as "classical music." Its dramaturgical relevance remains a blank space in the logs, which describe it as, e.g., "music European classical pompous" (log 12), "[a]ccompanied by rapturous music" (log 15) or "resounding choir music" (log 16).¹⁵

Why is such well-known music, part of the canon of European classical music, paid so little attention in the logs? Is it because knowledge of classical music is no longer part of the educational canon? Or that most of the writers are international students, less familiar with classical European art music? Or do they consider the music less important for the dramaturgy of the piece? The evening makes mention of a "requiem of humanity" (Dutzenberg 2017: 3); Orlin describes her attempt to "colonize Mozart," saying that she was "[...] wondering if it is possible, as South Africans, to colonise Mozart and at the same time use the everyday as a vehicle [...]."¹⁶ She does not see Mozart's *Requiem* as an expression of Western high culture, but translates and uses it from an African perspective as a commentary on cultural hegemony.

However, this information from the program notes and the press kit was not available to the students writing the logs. Thus, paratexts did not alert them to the dramaturgical relevance and specificity of the music. Their descriptions therefore concentrate on the scenic action, on what appeared to the writers of the logs to be a truly dangerous act of playing around with a large knife in a mouth, an act that provoked unease, even though the students merely saw the scene on video without witnessing the situation in a theater, thus not actually experiencing theatrical co-presence. Meanwhile, the high-pitched male voice of Tuba Mirum from Mozart's *Requiem* sings a Latin text, which translates to:

*Death and Nature shall be astonished
When all creation rises again
To answer to the Judge.*

¹⁵ | Translated by Elena Polzer.

¹⁶ | This quote comes from Robyn Orlin's description of the piece, printed in a file used to promote the piece, which she was kind enough to make available for our research.

*A book, written in, will be brought forth
In which is contained everything that is,
Out of which the world shall be judged.*¹⁷

This shows that the apparently dangerous act of eating the oranges is heightened by the lyrics, which can be read as a reference to colonial violence, thus situating 'race' in the scene.

The subsequent musical phrase in the requiem is entitled "Rex" (King)¹⁸ and continues the development of the thematic reference. When the music begins, the performer's body is (still) wrapped in plastic, almost entirely bound up, his black body conserved and on display; only his arms and mouth are free. He stabs an orange and squeezes it dry. The juices drip onto his face and his body, still wrapped in plastic. The logs describe the connotations of juice and blood, desire and destruction, life and death, all legible as colonial violence—as sexual greed and vice versa.

However, the scene also shows a moment of liberation from colonial violence: the severing of the cowbell from around the performer's neck, as well as the act of cutting open the plastic wrap. Men and women's voices call out "Salve me!" (Save me!) in Mozart's *Requiem*, as the heavy, black body—degraded to animal status by the cowbell—pours forth from the not yet entirely removed plastic wrap. In the context of white colonial rule, as this scene can also be read, the dream of salvation and justice remains unfulfilled. There is no 'merciful king,' no Christian 'redeemer of worlds' bringing salvation from oppression and slavery. The colonized have freed and must free themselves. Mozart's unanswered "Salve me!" becomes an outcry against the historical guilt of sustained colonial violence. Synchronous to the cutting open of the plastic wrap, we see a cow's carcass being slit open and a large butcher's knife in close-up on the rear screen. These images overlap with the performer's heavy, black, sweaty body.

What is not translated, i.e., the requiem's Latin text, which is not mentioned in the logs, thus becomes doubly dramaturgically relevant: on the one hand, Mozart's *Requiem* symbolizes globalized European high culture and thus hegemonic and cultural assets, which appear as a contrasting backdrop for the scenic presentation. On the other hand, the musical text appears to support the action, insofar as it functions as a colonial marker that poses questions of colonial guilt and personal responsibility. Although it demarcates a cultural European 'Self,' the text is not even understood in Europe (any more), not only due to it being sung in Latin, but also because—in the wake of secularization processes—its content is no longer part of a general canon of cultural knowledge.

¹⁷ | <http://www.good-music-guide.com/reviews/055lyrics.htm> (accessed: 15 May 2018).

¹⁸ | Begins at 17:41 min.

As that which is not understood and not translated, the musical text is comparable to the African languages (Zulu, Xhosa), the 'Other' cultures featured in the piece, languages that white European audiences do not understand either. Thus, Mozart's *Requiem* is used ambivalently in the piece itself: on the one hand as an element of what can now be considered globalized European 'cultural heritage' and a part of colonial history, and, on the other, as that which is forgotten and not understood even in formerly colonizing countries. The non-mentioning of the music in the logs is thus an expression of a missing translation of the cultural Self, of one's own European cultural heritage. This blank, this un-perceived, non-transcribed and non-translated element in the logs should be understood as an integral part of the dramaturgy, playing with perceptions of what is commonly considered 'Self' and 'Other'.

3.2 The 'Putin scene'

3.2.1 Condensing the logs into a "thick description": homophobia and global exploitation

The stage is dark. The performer is standing with his back to the audience. A black cameraman sitting on stage projects his actions onto a rectangular screen, which fills the back wall. We see a close-up of the performer's body. He is wearing a white sheet wrapped around him like a tunic and carrying a small sieve with sunglasses in front of his face like a mask. He has a trapezoidal black hat on his head, featuring a fake braid and rhinestones. We see his painted face—red circles on both cheeks, black lips, strong eyeliner, black stripes on both cheekbones, as well as individually painted black spots—in profile. Beforehand, he was repetitively singing the words: "You jealous me" (video recording 40:29 min).

The music starts again. The performer slowly turns his face forward until he is facing the audience. The projection to the rear of the stage shows a larger-than-life dancing man in a black suit on a white background; he is wearing a bow tie. The performer loudly and affectedly screams: "Oh, Putin" (42:33 min). His voice rises in pitch as he does so. The projected figure has his knees slightly bent, fists clenched; he lightly moves his forearms back and forth, alternately and rhythmically. The figure is standing with his weight on his left foot and his right leg relaxed. The figure rhythmically moves his hips from right to left. The performer turns to the projected figure and calls out: "Putin, you look so beautiful tonight." (42:47 min) At the same time, the figure continues dancing, repeating the same movements over and over, rhythmically moving his hips back and forth. Now, the performer spins around on the spot several times. A live image of the performer superimposed over the projected dancing figure intensifies this action. The audience sees itself in the background on screen behind the performer's image.

With outstretched arms and his back to the audience, the performer continues talking and walking toward the larger-than-life figure projected onto the rear

screen. His actions are superimposed live onto that figure. He adopts the rhythms of the projected Putin figure and moves his arms, upper body, and hips while speaking to him. What he says is not mentioned in the logs. The writers only report that this act of communication fails. But why did the writers feel that it had failed when they did not document the text of the conversation at all, not even in excerpts, and thus apparently considered it irrelevant?

3.2.2 Analysis of the logs: the neocolonial dance of domination and wealth

The logs describe the underlying communicative structure of the 'Putin scene' as follows: "The performer attempts to dance with him and fails [...] due to the projection" (log 8); "[...] apparently dances with the video, with Putin" (log 11); "Putin appears on the screen, rhythmically moving, whereupon the performer wants to dance with Putin" (log 14).¹⁹ But like the music, the spoken dialogue in this scene receives no mention in the logs. It also remains untranslated, although it plays a central role in the dramaturgy of the scene. This will be shown below using a differentiated analysis of the same scene. The following analysis thus proceeds in a reverse order to that of the 'oranges scene' analysis. It first focuses on what is not translated in the logs (the dialogue with the visual figure of Putin) and subsequently describes the translated elements (the acts of dealing with Putin) to illustrate that, in spite of the fact that the writers did not record or register the dialogue as being of elementary importance for the scene, they still perceived a conflation of the associated narrative of global capitalism with (post-)colonial exploitation.

3.2.2.1 The non-translated: the failed dialogue with the neocolonial rulers

While the performer dances with the Putin figure with his back to the audience, he calls out, "Oh, yes. Move your hips" (43:21 min), as if trying to change the video projection: he rotates his left hand: "Because you have been such a good boy, I am going to give you free oil from Africa." (43:31 min) The performer makes large arm movements, shifting from one leg to another, slightly teetering and rebounding. "I need more weapons. Nuclear weapons" (43:44 min), he calls out to the figure: "If you give me that, I'll give you all the minerals. I'll give you gold. Ha. I'll give you diamonds. For free." (43:52 min) Still dancing on the spot, he finally calls out: "Get down, Putin. Can you do this?" (44:05 min) And then he adds: "If you give me seven more barrels of weapons, you can dump your garbage anywhere in Africa. What do you think about that? Bring everything to Africa. Shit in all Africa!" (44:17 min) Mozart's music ends. Only the performer's voice can be heard. The video projection stops. The performer slows down his dance, he shifts irritatingly slowly from his right leg to his left: "Why would the music stop? Putin, why did you stop dancing? I was just getting into the groove. And then the music stops, and you stopped dancing?" (44:41 min) he angrily asks. And he reduces his

19 | Translated by Elena Polzer.

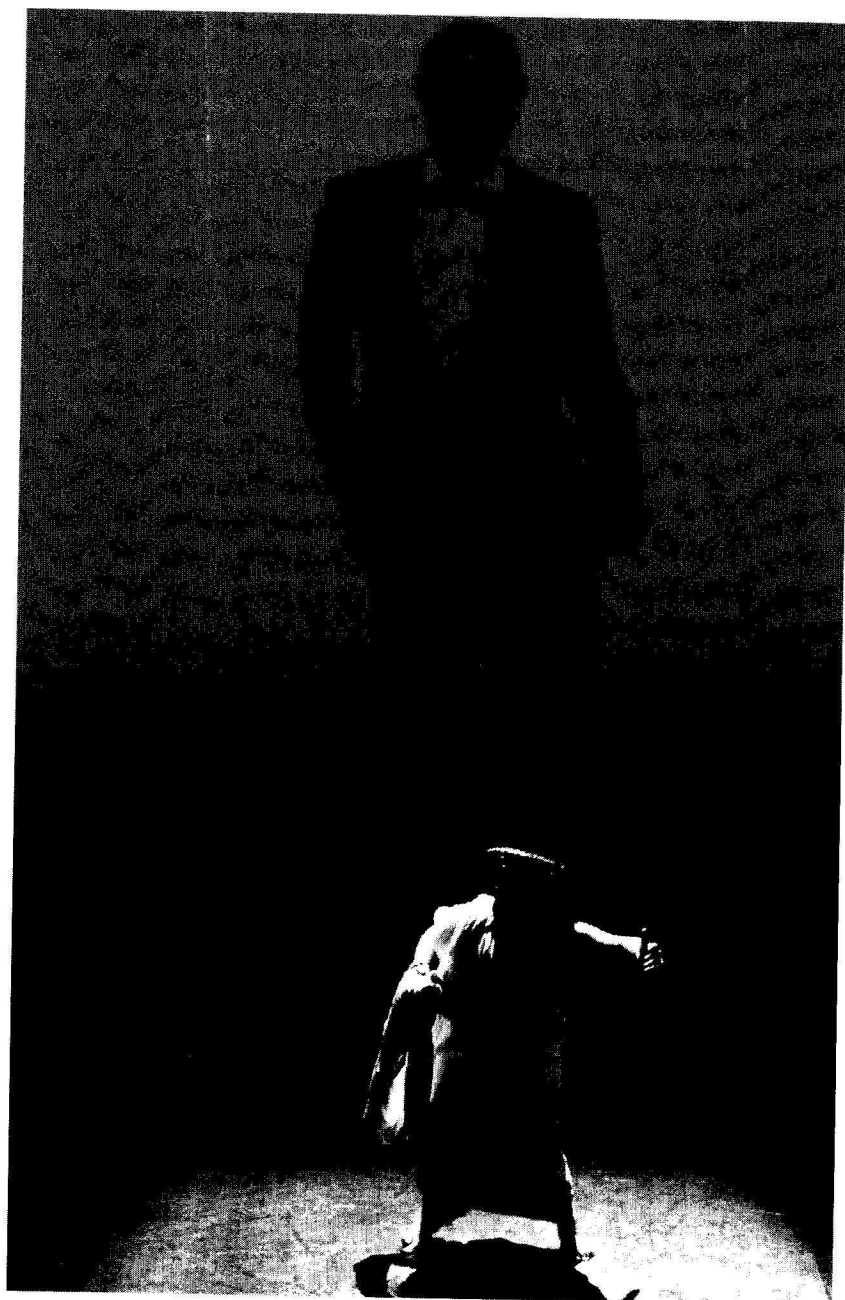


Photo 02: Albert Silindokuhle Ibokwe Khoza with a projected image of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin ('Putin scene') © Jérôme Séron

movements to making light arm movements with his right hand, emphasizing his words with gestures, his left hand hanging against his body: "What's happening?" (44:51 min) he asks and takes off his hat. We see his black scalp, his hair cropped on both sides. He removes the sunglasses and the sieve, which had been functioning as a mask, from his face: "I mean, honestly, what is wrong? You don't want to dance with me, because I'm a man?" (44:57 min) There is a short pause: "Or you don't want to dance with me, because I am a black man? Which is which, Putin?" (45:03 min) The performer is still standing with his back to the audience, his gaze directed at the projection. He stands still and turns away, lays aside the glasses, the sieve, and the hat: "I mean, Putin, you can't do this to me. I came here prepared. Ahh! I still have another outfit, Putin. Hm. I mean, what is wrong with you? Do you think you are better than me?" (45:12 min) He changes his costume on stage and puts on a long tiger-print sarong. His torso remains uncovered. He is still talking to the dancing figure: "No, you are not. You are not superior. Fuck that! You are definitely not more superior than me. He? I can't come here and you stop dancing, when I am getting into the groove." (45:25 min) The performer goes to the middle of the stage and stands on a chair, positioned at the middle of the edge of the stage with his back to the audience. His arms are hanging beside his body. Turning to the audience, he says: "What's wrong? Is it because I am not wearing those expensive suits you wear?" (45:41 min) He stretches his arms supportively in the air and calls out: "Look what I wear, Putin." (45:48 min) Through the live camera on the ceiling, we see the performer sitting on the armchair, white sheets spread out beneath him. We hear Mozart's *Requiem*: "You see, Putin. What I wear! It is not the suits you wear." (45:53 min) He lists off various names of well-known international fashion labels: "See Putin, what I wear is in abundance in my country. And because of that I am not better, Putin." (46:20 min) Via the live projection on the backstage screen, we see the performer's painted face, his naked torso, a stick, two African whips, a small wooden bowl and its contents, chains, and a white sheet. He spreads out the large colorful bird feathers hanging from the cape around his hips and picks up two whips lying on the floor beside the chair, then crosses them in front of his chest: "See Putin, where I come from, we dance with our weapons." (46:40 min) Then he says, laughing: "Putin, try to top this!" (46:53 min) The music becomes more dramatic. He stands up and starts to dance.

Unlike the autoerotic practices of the performer wrapped in plastic foil and his sole interaction with objects and the voyeuristic position of the (European) audience in the 'oranges scene,' the 'Putin scene' situates interaction at the crossroads of language, movement, and projection. The performer talks, dances, and interacts with a projected image; he is communicating with a present and simultaneously absent neo-colonial ruler. The projection of the Russian president Vladimir Putin contrasts with the presence of a black performer in a three-dimensional stage space. The medial situatedness of the present figure (the performer's presence on stage) and the present-absent figure (the media enactment of the Putin image) is a

kind of 'romantic date' and, as a 'date,' it must fail, because the one being called on does not answer, since he is merely being projected into the situation and is thus unreachable. The stereotypical repetition of his dance movements underlines his indifference, his distance, and his elusiveness. The performer's permanent failure to invoke him demonstrates the helplessness and hopelessness of the communicative act. His questions, reproaches, and accusations come to nothing. They remain unheard. His summons, based on pop songs and underlaid with sexual connotations, fall short: "Oh, yes. Move your hips." (43:19 min) or "Yes, oh, Putin! Yes, get down, Putin! Can you do this? Get down, get down, get down." (44:03 min) But the figure does not change its movements; it does not submit.

The interaction between the theatrical and medial situatedness of the scene produces the appearance of something shared, which is actually an illusion, and is unmasked as such. It is the illusion of two bodies dancing together, of a white and a black one, a ruling body and a ruled body, a theatrical and a medial body. Presence and absence are thus staged as genuine elements constituting relationships of power and domination. The different situatednesses of the dancers only changes when the dancing figure freezes because the video stops, and the performer simultaneously takes off the mask of the African tyrant (hat, sieve, sunglasses). He manifests as someone injured, making himself vulnerable. "I mean, what is wrong with you? What is wrong with you? Do you think you are better than me? No, you are not. You are not superior. Fuck that! You are definitely not more superior than me. He? I can't come here, and you stop dancing, when I am getting into the groove." (45:23 min) What is expressed here is the disruption of the illusion of an encounter between equals. An act of dancing together that never existed and, if at all, was only based on a one-sided invitation. It is a couple's dance that ends even before it has started.

3.2.2.2 What is translated: whips, diamonds and gold—the economic greed for global domination

According to the observation logs, the 'Putin scene' follows the previous scene of the 'Nubian queen' (33:12–42:22 min), which dramaturgically anticipates it: "There was a dance session between the performer and the President of Russia: Putin, him asking Putin to send weapons in exchange for oil and mines (Gold, Diamond)." (Log 22)²⁰ So, even before the 'Putin scene,' the piece addresses (post-)colonial trade in African commodities. Via a live projection on stage, the performer as the 'Nubian queen' in close-up presents his left hand first without and then wearing various rings. The performance is supported by the words: "Alright, so. I am going to show you my very, very interesting collection. Hmm. One of my favorites has to be this one. Do you like my ring?" (37:31 min) "You jealous of me. Hmm. And then there was this one. And then this one." (38:00 min) What is being exposed

here is the exorbitance of material greed and envy, as connected to things (gold, diamonds). And, so, the performer as the 'Nubian queen' remarks almost casually:

You see the nice thing about where I am come from is that all these resources are in abundance. You know? You know where I come from in South Africa, you just put your hand firmly into the soil, all right. And then you pull it out. And when you come out: voilà. Diamonds and gold. (38:13 min)

The performer pitches rings and other luxury items, thereby drawing attention to himself and the objects. The scene shows ways in which the fetishism of the global circulation of commodities is created and how structures of desire are produced. In the trade agreement between Putin and the African tyrant, in which diamonds and gold are exchanged for weapons, and the natural resources of the country are sold off to stabilize personal power, there are only (male) perpetrators.

The correlation between domination and masculinity reveals itself in the transformation of the gender attributes associated with the performer: thus, the logs emphasize that his gender attributes also change in these scenes: he begins as the 'Nubian queen,' i.e., as a female African goddess of beauty, and changes into a male tyrant dancing with Putin. The subject of economic greed already introduced in the 'Nubian queen' scene is narrowed down in the 'Putin Scene' to contact between two men, the 'African tyrant' and Putin, to the exploitation of African resources, and the trade in nuclear weapons. The performer in his role as 'African tyrant' thus discusses with Putin:

Because you have been such a good boy, I am going to give you free oil from Africa [...] Oh, what do you think about that? But I need a favor, Putin. I need more weapons. Nuclear weapons. If you give me that I'll give you all the minerals. I give you gold. Ha. I give you diamonds. For free. (43:31 - 43:57 min)

The projected figure stops dancing: Putin's image freezes. Dramaturgically, the 'Putin scene' resituates the moment of greed, not only by bringing up the subject of impending catastrophe and potential global apocalypse through the dangerous trade in nuclear weapons, but also because Mozart's *Requiem* here takes on another function. Unlike in the 'oranges scene,' the requiem has no commentary function in the 'Putin scene.' It has an enhancing effect and becomes an allegory for global catastrophe: a requiem for all. By musically enhancing the scenic narrative, greed not only appears as an unrestrained practice of desiring more, but also as a motor for the unrestricted maximum expansion of profits and power.

In this respect, the 'Putin scene' translates actual political issues (e.g., neo-colonial Russian expansion politics on the one hand and commodities and weapons trade with African countries on the other), whereby the translation into an aesthetic is itself considered an instrument of power. This is apparent, e.g., in the meaning of the dance, which is here more than a purely aesthetic practice as we have in Western European cultures, but rather a powerful act, a male sexual act

20 | Original English.

and, as such, a political demonstration of domination and violence. “Where I am from we dance with our weapons,” the performer as the ‘African tyrant’ explains. This is supported by an act of self-empowerment at the end of the ‘Putin scene’: the performer spreads out the large colorful bird feathers hanging from his cape, taking two whips lying on the floor next to the chair into his hands and crossing them across his chest. He dances a traditional, ritual war dance, charged with animist characters: “See Putin, where I come from, we dance with our weapons.” (46:40 min) He laughs and adds: “Putin, try to top this.” (46:53 min)

In the ‘Putin scene’ the political can be described on three levels: the aesthetic translation of the political in terms of real-life political and geopolitical issues (commodity and weapons trade in Africa, issues of race and gender), the artistic practice of overwriting cultural symbols, signs, and things within the context of medial translations, leading to the destabilization of established power relationships and the opening up of new contexts, and, finally, the aesthetic translation of an understanding of dance as a political act.

4. THE SITUATEDNESS OF POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND MEDIAL TRANSLATIONS

Based on the observation logs, as well as the performance analyses, which fill in some of the blanks in the logs, we will now identify and summarize the basic patterns of the piece as expressed in the logs:

Both scenes described here deal with configurations of desire, and practices of taking pleasure and striving for ownership, performatively expressed in interactions and through the creation of a network of players i.e., things, materials, people, projections and presences, languages and music. The way they interact creates an ambivalent fabric of suspense, oscillating between desire and greed, power and violence, unfolding via markers of gender and race. The orange as fruit, juice, nourishment thus represents the feminine. The covetous consumption of fruit in the ‘oranges scene’ is initially staged as gender-indifferent and can be read, regardless of gender affiliation, as an act of empowerment. On the other hand, the joyful consumption of the fruit’s flesh is limited, autoerotic, and destructive in its self-referentiality. The only ones participating in this sexual act are objects (oranges and a butcher’s knife) and a voyeuristic (in our case European) audience. The act of enjoyment ends with the piercing, squashing, and eating of the oranges, and, in this respect, it also involves the destruction of the fruit with the help of a weapon, a knife, thus also signifying the destruction of nourishing elements and of the feminine. The final liberation takes place with the cutting open of the plastic wrap, i.e., demonstrating, on the one hand, that what was desired can only be enjoyed in a restricted and self-referential way, and on the other, that liberation also leads to being unambiguously gendered as male. Liberating oneself from the plastic wrap, which massively restricted the body, but also allowed it to appear gender-neutral,

queer, and defiant of heteronormativity, is only possible by abstaining from desire and by destroying the object of that desire.

The ‘Putin scene’ situates the subjects of desire within a concrete social context, taking pleasure in things and striving for ownership over them. The context is the late capitalist, global, neo-liberally inspired, unrestricted, profit-oriented pursuit of material wealth, power, and political influence, which reveals itself in the handling of luxury items and in the dialogue with the Putin character. The choreographic arrangement, the dramaturgical design, and the handling of objects and projections on stage thus produce a narrative of obsessive desire and intended ownership by interweaving sexual and economic layers, and sexual and economic greed, which surface as a motor for exploitation and suppression in terms of gender, race and neo-colonial domination by new global powers and ‘black tyrants.’ In the ‘Putin scene,’ this greed is presented as uninhibited and infinite, as amoral and male, as greed that (inevitably) leads to global catastrophe.

5. REFLECTIONS: ACADEMIC TRANSLATIONS OF ARTISTIC PRACTICES

This text combines three different practices of translation: practices of artistically translating (political) issues and world views, practices of perceiving and transcribing those translations, and practices of academically analyzing a body of data. In doing so, we see that artistic practices of choreographing and the associated artistic research that they involve follow a different logic than that of spectators’ practices of perception or academic practices of analysis. Translation practices of observing and transcribing differ in turn from those of analyzing and interpreting, although they are both reflective practices. It is thus not possible to clearly polarize artistic and academic practices, because, e.g., observing and transcribing are not only academic practices, but also common artistic practices in rehearsal processes (together with taking notes, choreology, notation, choreographic outlining; Klein 2017).

However, the ‘situational’ and ‘situatedness’ do take on different meanings in art and science. The situational aspect of performance—its fluidity—cannot be grasped in reflection, but only remains a memory, a “presence effect” (Gumbrecht 2016). The situatedness of performance, its framing, i.e., its temporal, cultural, theatrical, or medial horizon of meaning, is what actually allows the past to be visualized at all. A process of perception and realization thus condenses the situational and situatedness into a historically specific constellation. In this respect, not only do various logics of translation practices come together in artistic and academic processes, such as the translation of aesthetic experience into empirical data and the interpretation of said data, as in our case. Rather, this reflection is precisely what allows the interplay of the situational and situatedness, as well as the historicity of the research itself to become visible and accessible. In this

respect, the simultaneously practical and theoretical perspective chosen here is also a critical analytical project, which, by taking a methodological, empirical, experience-based approach, always also relates the situatedness of academic and artistic practices to one another.

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