

The end of choreography

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Abstract

The End of Choreography is a commissioned video (2013, <https://vimeo.com/80257439>), a lecture presentation (2015) and a performative essay (2016). As a PaR project concerned with choreography in the expanded field, these multiple manifestations problematize the notion of the artwork, questioning what impact context has on the reading and the meaning of a work. In this provocation I mix images with written text, use references from different disciplines and historical eras, quote well-known international theorists and philosophers alongside local choreographers and dance practitioners. I also refer to pieces I have seen, read about and participated in. Thus, I create a variety of contexts and reference points, questioning the meaning, value and purpose of choreography at the beginning of the twenty-first century. For this written version of *The End of Choreography* I collaborated with a graphic designer to present the work in a different medium, exploring the potentialities of translating the video onto the page as a textual document. Rather than presenting a closed argument, my aim is to trigger a debate about the current state of affairs in the field, whether this be the end, or future, of choreography.

Keywords

collaboration

performative writing

typography

interdisciplinary practice

intertextuality

expanded choreography/choreography as expanded practice

practice as research

alternative documentation

When I think about the end of choreography I think about...

... the meaning of the word and its Greek roots, literally meaning dance-writing. And how it happened that these two supposedly opposed words come together in one term. Because, let's be honest: the body cannot write.

... Roland Barthes and how the symbolic death of the author ([1968] 1977), must mean the birth of the reader and perhaps by extension to the theatre, the birth of the spectator. And then by extension to dance, would the death of the choreographer mean the birth of the dancer or the birth of the dance-watcher?

... Mårten Spångberg who writes on his blog: 'Dance has been banned from history because of its *ephemeral* status as Peggy Phelan wrote in 1993, *performance becomes itself through its own disappearance* (1993). When something dies something new can emerge, but if dance has no history, this means that either dance is new, like NEW, all the time, or is rendered immobile exactly due its lack of history. Is it possibly so that dance precisely because it lacks history cannot issue transformation, and at the same time because it has no history it cannot produce contemporaneity?' (Spångberg 2010)

... the death of probably the two most important contemporary choreographers in 2009 [Pina Bausch, Merce Cunningham, Michael Jackson, Patrick Swayze].

... André Lepecki and his definition of choreography as a system of command (Allsopp and Lepecki 2008).

... I think of Trajal Harrell's piece *Ticke the Sleeping Giant #9* in which his dancers take a sleeping drug before the eight-hour performance installation. I think about how the choreographer is perhaps more of an attendant, both in the sense of physically being there but also in a sense of caring.

... Boris Charmatz and his company's manipulation of limb children in *enfant*.

... Roberta Jean and Stephanie McMann's piece *Road Postures* at Dance Umbrella 2013 and how it was basically a solo for Steph and how Roberta choose to describe her role in the programme notes as artistic direction, and not as choreography.

... Gillie Kleiman and how it says on her Chisenhale profile that she does *dance stuff that doesn't always look like dance* (n.d.).

... *re-re-twothousandth-re*, a piece by Trio Collective which was performed at Chisenhale Dance Space in 2011 and I think about how we basically likened the act of choreography to the act of editing past choreographies together.

... my first choreography that I ever made called *Hybrid* and how deeply uncomfortable and unethical I felt asking my dancers to improvise on tasks and make

material, then selecting the bits that I liked, putting them together and saying that I was the choreographer of the piece. And I think of all the programme notes that say *choreography in collaboration with the dancers* and I think about what that really means and about the (im)possibility of collaboration.

... I also think about the blurry line between dancer and choreographer and how most of us probably describe ourselves as both.

... Michael Kliën, who in 1994, declared 'Choreography and Dance to be fully independent of one-another; i.e. as autonomous disciplines requiring specialist skill-sets for each' (2013). The piece was called 68 per cent choreography and it was a performance-installation for a machine and a violin.

... and I think about the fact that choreography doesn't necessarily need people and that we can find choreography in everything (four images go here).

... Marquez and Zangs and what they mean when they say that they want to 'raise questions and awareness of what choreography can do as it is too commonly reduced to the word dance' (2013).

... Charlotte Ashwell and Eleanor Sikorski's online dialogue on Bellyflop about curators including circus into a dance programme (Ashwell 2013).

... Marcel Duchamp placing an upside down urinal into a gallery in 1914 and declaring it art and that then makes me think of Andy Warhol and his Brillo Boxes which were just copies of real Brillo Boxes and that then makes me think about Arthur Danto declaring the end of art (1997) because anything from now could be art.

And that makes me think of Noël Carroll writing about *Trio A* being the end of dance (Carroll 2003) because from 1966 onwards everyday movement, indeed every movement, could be called dance. But isn't it too easy to say that all dance is really just movement or all movement is choreographed?

... the recent move of dance to the museum/gallery [Tate logo] with all its potentials and problems, and I think about the exploitation of choreographic strategies by visual artists.

... Tino Sehgal and what it does to dance when someone who clearly comes from a background in dance and whose practice clearly used well-known strategies and tools for producing choreographic works situates himself in a fine art context, not as a choreographer who makes work in the museum, but as an artist operating in the art world. [Turner Prize?]

... Alexandrina Hemsley and the Swedish Dance History Vol. 4, where they write in the editorial: 'An expanded choreography owns the future. Dance as we know it, is soon, if not already dead as opera or Dixie-land jazz. Very dead. Yet, the future, more than ever, belongs to choreography, but only if it acknowledges its potentiality as an expanded capacity. Choreography is not the art of making dances (a directional set of tools), it is a generic set of capacities to be applied to any kind of production, analyses, or organization. Choreography is a structural approach to the world and dance its mode of knowing the world it ventures into. Dance is the future embodied, a promise of that to come' (Spångberg 2013).

... what the organisers of the *Expanded Choreography: Situations. Movements, Objects,..* conference propose:

'Choreography is today emancipating itself from dance, engaging in a vibrant process of articulation. Choreographers are experimenting with new models of production, alternative formats, have broadened out the understanding of social choreography considerably and are mobilizing innovative frontiers in respect of self-organization, empowerment and autonomy. Simultaneously, we have seen a number of exhibitions in which choreography is often placed in a tension between movement, situation and objects. Choreography needs to redefine itself in order to include artists and others who use choreographic strategies without necessarily relating them to dance. At the same time, it needs to remain inclusive of choreographers involved in practices such as engineering situations, organization, social choreography and movement as well as expanding towards cinematic strategies, documentary and documentation and rethinking publication, exhibition, display, mediatization, production and post-production. In short, choreography is currently experiencing a veritable revolution. Aesthetically, it is turning away from established notions of dance and its strong association with skill and craft, to instead establish autonomous discourses that override causalities among conceptualization, production, expression and representation. At the same time it is gaining momentum on a political level as it is placed in the middle of a society to a large degree organized around movement, subjectivity and immaterial exchange. Choreography is not a priori performative, nor is it bound to expression and reiteration of subjectivity; it is becoming an expanded practice, a practice that is political in and of itself' (Spångberg et al. 2012).

... the choreographer, *this* choreographer, who withdraws (voluntarily or involuntarily) from the scene and is replaced by dancers, curators, objects, thinkers, texts, images, machines, or PowerPoint presentations.

... I also think about its future. How protective should we be? How open-minded? How expanded can we go? If anything can be choreography the term perhaps renders itself meaningless, redundant, obsolete.

So, I think about the end of choreography as being simultaneously its future and I want to ask all of you, today: What is the purpose and role of the choreographer? What is left for choreography to say, to do?

Logos used in the contribution solely act as visual references.

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Contributor details

Antje Hildebrandt is a choreographer, performer, researcher and lecturer based in the United Kingdom. Her work, which takes the form of conventional theatre pieces as well as site-specific works, videos and installations, has been presented in various platforms, festivals and galleries in the United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden. As well as making solo work she often collaborates with other artists and she has worked and performed with Serbian Artistic Collective Doplenger, Willi Dorner, Lea Anderson, Ivana Müller, Franko B and Tino Sehgal. Antje is a member of Trio, a collective of four artists who are interested in collaborative performance practice. Antje's writing has been published in *Activate*, *Choreographic Practices*, *Desearch*, *Motio* and *The Swedish Dance History*. As joint Manifesto Lexicon Officer she sits on the Board of Directors of Performance Studies international. Antje holds a practice-led Ph.D. on post-conceptual dance and expanded choreographic performance practices. She is a lecturer in Dance at the University of Lincoln.

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