

Things That Move: A Dance Mat

Simo Kellokumpu

revolutionary abstraction rolled utopia bulldozing cliché rubbed atlas something else



Fig. 1: Simo Kellokumpu, A Dance Mat, site specific performance, Institut für Sport und Sportwissenschaft at Karlsruhe Institute für Technologie, October 6, 2018. Photo: Luca Forcucci.

A dance-studio is a place considered as one of the places where a choreographer works. This proposal examines one particular material object often used in dance-studios and on stages: a dance mat. A dance mat is a techno-industrial object, which rubs off and erases the characteristics of the surface beneath it attempting to homogenize the surface of the space. It aims to offer a feeling of safety and it is supposed to be an ideal plane to work. It separates the bodies above the messy and noisy ground. It aims to offer neutralized and

atemporal topography where the body is put, thrown and positioned on. The dance mat aims to open a place, which is nowhere and at the same time it has a possibility to interact with all places from e.g. ballet, butoh and belly-dance. Literally, the sensuous body is rubbed against a dance mat. It is also a by-product of oil. In this project a choreographer examines the materiality of the dance mat by displacing it from its appropriate use. The project shapeshifts through on-going metamorphosis that proliferates simultaneously to living sculpture, dance, choreography, installation, performance and live-art.

Things that move: A Dance Mat

In order to respond to the open call for *Tanz der Dinge/Things that dance*, I proposed to perform a project called *A Dance Mat*¹, described above, for 45 minutes within the symposium's program in the studio or outdoors. The performance included a discussion with the audience in which the critical questions of the agency and the materiality of the dance mat were discussed.

The *Dance Mat* project examines questions such as: What kind of subject does this object produce? What kind of body does this object bring out? Who or what is moved and how? Who or what is choreographed and how? How does the choreographic emerge and operate between materiality and corporeality? What does this object do in studios and on stages? What kind of a kinesthetic field does it generate and how does it produce movement? What happens when the aim to produce trained danced movements on a smooth plane turns to a critical examination of the material condition, which usually supports this intention? How does this shift reposition my agency as a choreographer or choreoreader?

In Karlsruhe the performance took place outdoors in the backyard of the building in which the symposium took place. The chosen place offered possibilities to engage with the architecture of the building, the park-like environment, surrounding bushes and woods, and random passers-by. In the performance twisting, rubbing, lifting, throwing, spreading, rolling, and folding were just a few techniques exploring the relation between my body and the dance mat. Basically whatever I did – running with the dance mat to the bushes, pushing it against the building, diving under it, wrestling with it, gently caressing it – the dance mat offered endless sculptural forms and shapes. My body got exhausted. In the end I don't think *any-thing* necessarily danced in the performance, but certainly moved.

As an artist I am interested in the conditions of movement and inhabiting these conditions in order to make choreo-orientated art. In the choreoreading

1 *A Dance Mat* project is part of Simo Kellokumpu's doctoral artistic research project *Choreography as reading practice*, which he has conducted in 2013-2019 in the Performing Arts Research Centre in the Theatre Academy in the University of the Arts Helsinki.

practice I examine the question: “What is the material that forms a possibility for the choreographic to emerge?” This question about the material that forms the possibility for the choreographic to emerge makes choreo-orientated practice an operation, which negotiates, examines, processes, interacts with, and interferes with perceiving, experiencing, and sensing such materials. The key to the *choreographic* here lies in the viewpoint that the relation to the material can be simultaneously plural, filled with many different situated and contextual multidirectional forces. In practice it is crucial to stay open and unfinished towards this plurality. To inhabit these multidirectional forces generates the reciprocal reading-writing process from which the embodied *choreographic* emerges. From this viewpoint, “*making* choreography” as a human artistic activity explores, studies, articulates, creates, shifts, moves, mobilizes, reroutes, and processes the perception and experience of the chosen moving, material and cultural context in a specific way.

