Situational Worlds. Complicity as a Model of Collaboration

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Dance and other stage productions such as music, scenographic arrangements or performances are ephemeral media, whose products cannot be reproduced. Even when a piece is shown over and over again, it is never the same, for it changes from performance to performance, from context to context, from space to space, from audience to audience. Performers act in the now and according to the situation among themselves and with the audience. They work on the level of perception by creating moods and intensities, which cannot be fully explained by the utterly transparent and reproducible blueprints of choreography. These aspects make theatrical work so interesting and at the same time fragile. Dance calls attention to situational potentials, which may be specific, but are also world-generating in other areas of society that are today increasingly characterized by instability rather than stability (cf. Latour 2007: 18ff).[1]

I am thus less interested in the dangers, than in the potentials of instable and temporary environments concerning collective working processes. Dancers possess situational competencies, which enable them to represent something for a moment and create a world. Besides the application of technique, their forms of

1 Bruno Latour describes this development as "reassembling the social". His associative sociology diagnoses not only the deterioration of social ties, but also focuses on new – namely associative – connections that do not function according to a stable principle. These are reassemblies, characterized by new links and in which unexpected elements are connected with each other. These links are by no means weak, but cannot be described with traditional categories. They are often transient and lose their strength immediately after articulation.

expression are created by intensely confiding in each other physically and emotionally, although their time together is usually limited. In their specific form of collaboration, they combine such contradictory qualities of contact as intensity and transience, commitment and temporality, the public sphere and intimacy, trust and mistrust, effectivity and fragility. How can such situational forms of collectivity be described? Are such collective dynamics already being similarly practiced in other professional fields due to social transformations or are they unique to dance?

In the following paper, I would like to discuss the concept of complicity as a model of collective work. Complicity is a specific form of collaboration, which emerges in temporary and creative working environments. Complicity cultivates the accessing of twilight zones and permits informal working processes and intimacy. It is precisely the secrecy within the group, which holds its members together and strengthens the collective. In order to deepen our understanding of this term, I will explain how it differs from other social and organizational theoretical terms for group work such as teamwork, the formation of alliances and networking. Friendship also follows a different kind of logic of relationships than complicity. These theoretical thoughts will be combined with statements by the dancer Anna Huber, who I interviewed for our research film (cf. Weber/Ziemer 2007) on her complicity with percussionist Fritz Hauser during the creation of her piece *handundfuss* in 2006. A further research project[2] of mine, in which dancers, musicians, entrepreneurs and academics all equally participated, forms the basis of this analysis.

THE TERM COMPLICITY

What is complicity? In German, complicity is almost exclusively used in a negative way, in order to name collective crimes that are obscure and are committed without a clear perpetrator. The theory of felony as expounded in criminal law offers a concise definition to whose Swiss version I herewith refer. Complicity means accompliceship: "Accompliceship can be distinguished as the collaborative committing of a felony in conscious and purposeful cooperation." (Reh-

2 The research project took place from 2006 to 2010 at the Institute for Theory at the Zurich University for the Arts and was financed by the Commission for Technology and innovation Berlin. Project Head: Gesa Ziemer, Research associates: Andrea Notroff, Nina Aemisegger, Film: Barbara Weber, http://www.ith-z.ch/forschung/komplizenschaft/ (January 29, 2011).

berg/Donatsch 2001: 138). The quotation indicates that it is not the responsibility and guilt of a person on which the focus here lies, but the 'co' of accomplice. How is this 'co' practiced? How is it structured? Why is this 'co', which generally is forced to function under adverse circumstances, so effective? These are questions that interest judges, when imposing a sentence. The power of complicity lies in the fact that a group can develop unforeseeable powers in ways that a single person isn't capable of. The specificity of complicity is that the individual can be sentenced on the basis of his or her involvement in the group and not on the grounds of their individual actions.

Complicity is divided into three phases: accomplices mutually make a decision, plan a course of action together and implement it as a joint effort. Classical accomplices pass through these three phases together. The interesting thing about this three-step system is that it includes the entire development from concept to practical implementation. While the decision-making process is still strongly situated in the visionary realm, possible real circumstances are taken into consideration in the planning phase. The implementation then translates the plan into concrete action and is entirely practical. Accomplices thus not only contribute their thoughts, they are also co-perpetrators and in their actions combine theory and practice par excellence. These three steps, which are a succession of idea – feasibility – implementation, therefore brings up questions of whether a transfer of the term to other, legal forms of group work – such as in the framework of art – is possible. The question of 'perpetration' gives rise to possibilities for translation. These exist when, "the party to an offence has reasons to decide on the actual committal of the crime together with others" (id.). The decision-making must refer to the joint realization of the plan. What is clear is that all parties can have a determining influence on the course of the action and thus also bear joint responsibility. A person, who is part of a complicit group, trusts the others, because he knows that the actions of the others will weigh just as heavily as his own. The steering of the collective is thus influenced by the collective itself and not only by an individual. The other person is just as responsible for me as I am responsible for myself. I am just as responsible for the other as for myself.

It is also of some significance for complicity, how accomplices behave towards those, who are not part of the group. Complicity produces exclusion. These are not open integrative groups, who invite as many as possible to take part. Complicity instead aims towards including individuals, who can bring very individual specific abilities into the group. Complicity requires the courage to make one's own strengths relevant for the goal of the group. The forms of expression that complicity can take are therefore also always connected to whether

they are behaving towards an evidently or indirectly repressive person or towards a benevolent one.

DEMARCATIONS: TEAMWORK

In order to more clearly define the term, it is helpful to isolate it from other forms of relationships, such as teamwork, the forming of alliances, networking, and friendship. A team is a group of people set on solving a given task. Teams that function well usually consist of people with different abilities, who pursue a certain goal in an efficient manner and reach this goal bar of any incidents and in accordance with a transparent group structure. Teams often adhere to existing structures and do not invent new ones. In management literature, teams are described as result-orientated actors: "They come together to solve problems, exchange information, make decisions, plan strategies and procedures." (Hölscher/Reiber/Pape/Loehnert-Baldermann 2006: 3) Teams act in a planned and structured manner and are composed for longer periods of time. Our society depends on experienced, functioning teams routinely working in given structures in many ways and many places. When we see a fire brigade or a medical team at work, we immediately understand that these teams have to be alert and flexible, but should not constantly question the structures in which they work (cf. Weick/Sutcliffe 2003)[3].

In contrast to teams, who have to avert the unexpected under extreme circumstances, accomplices literally provoke the unexpected to happen. In certain areas of the arts, where unusual aesthetics are a mark of quality, the unexpected is almost expected. In such experimental fields, artistic accomplices do not act purposefully, as they often do not yet know their exact aim. They come together and in this moment of encounter create a direction, a format, a product. Let us apply these thoughts to the production *handundfuss* from 2006, for which Anna Huber and Fritz Hauser collaborated for the first and only time. For both it was also the first experience with interaction between the media of the body and per-

3 In such cases, instabilities in the structure would impede a trouble-free and smooth handling of emergencies and may, if worst comes to worst, lead to catastrophes. The organization theorists Karl E. Weick and Kathleen M. Sutcliffe support this observation, having examined so-called High Reliability Organizations, such as teams working in hospitals or nuclear power plants. These are relied upon to avert all unexpected occurrences as early as possible. See: Karl E. Weick/Kathleen M. Sutcliffe: *Das Unerwartbare Managen. Wie Unternehmen aus Extremsituationen lernen* (2003).

cussion. Rehearsals began with movement, percussion, reflection, and improvisation in an empty space. Both are seasoned and experienced artists in their own fields, but working together was new for them. There were no pre-determined structures for their interaction; these were invented in the act of creation. As accomplices, they together developed a form of body percussion, in which the music does not illustrate the dancing and vice versa. The conspiratorial moment, which admitted no outside audience, was crucial in the early rehearsal phase. Making mistakes, overstepping boundaries, senseless and sensible attempts at expression only really become productive under non-public conditions. Especially during the first few rehearsals this intimacy is absolutely necessary.

FORMING ALLIANCES

The term alliance helps to define another useful difference. The term is generally used to describe a strategic form of cooperation between large groups, such as enterprises or nation states, but not between individuals (cf. Todeva/Knoke 2002). Groups form alliances when their power is threatened and it is necessary to have allies in order to secure territory or power. In economics and in politics, alliances are regarded as long-term strategic collaborations aimed at establishing synergies. Usually they serve to increase one's own wealth of knowledge and experience in order to maintain one's market position more effectively and with better target strategies. An alliance comprises coordinated action by a specific group in order to assert their position against competition. The members of an alliance do not necessarily share a common goal. Instead it is more about reaching one's own goal, which under the given circumstances is only possible by entering into an alliance.

Alliances differ from complicity mainly in their strategic procedure. Michel de Certeau's differentiation between tactics and strategy is helpful in this regard, as he defines complicity more as tactics. What distinguishes the tactician from the strategist? The strategist lives in a place "that can be described as his 'own' and that can serve as a basis for the organization of his relationships with a specific outside world (competitors, opponents, a clientele, an 'aim' or 'object' of research)" (de Certeau 1988: 23). Strategists act with purpose from the basis of a specific territory – this may be a company, a nation state, a professionally or socially defined position – and carry out calculated transactions. They intentionally manipulate the balance of power. A subject equipped with willpower and power can gain profit from his advantages, prepare to expand, and remain as indepen-

dent as possible from external factors. Outside forces can be observed from a safe place, measured up as objects, controlled and incorporated.

In contrast to the strategist, the tactician only has the place of the other. Taktiké literally means the 'art of arrangement and positioning (on a battle field)', which means that the tactician acts in conjunction with others. This etymological difference shows that strategy has a hierarchical, tactics a situational leadership model. A tactician takes the available powers, qualities, and effects, and organizes them quickly and according to the given situation. Accomplices in this case have a relationship to the other, "without being able to fully comprehend and or keep him at a distance" (id.). They constantly juggle with various components that open up opportunities for action. They do not possess an autonomous place that allows them to separate themselves from the others. Tactics run wild and create surprises. They are most likely to occur, where they are not expected.

Complicity, as opposed to alliance, is more a tactical way of acting. It allows partners to utilize opportunities that arise, to combine unlikely elements, and thus create fissures and holes in the fabric of established systems. Tactics, due to their context-orientated ability to react, are highly dynamic and useful for creating new situations. Anna Huber says: "Fritz Hauser came to one of my premieres because somebody said he makes music the way I dance. That's how our collaboration began." (Weber/Ziemer 2007: n.p.) The quote shows that this was not a case of dancer looking for a musician, but of finding one. The interaction is not strategic, mainly because it does not primarily serve to maintain an individual identity as dancer or musician. Instead, this encounter of skills leads to the creation of something else: the result of unpredictable dynamics provoked. This takes place on stage in the very moment, when performers are not exclusively performing their ideal form, but instead using situational arrangement to show how processes develop and effects unfold.

NETWORKING

A network is the form of organization closest to complicity, but there are still differences. Sociologist Manuel Castells describes the social structure of the network, a result of new information and communication technologies, as based on a decentralized flexibilization of work and life, displacement, and less hierarchical organizational structures (cf. Castells 2001: 423). This social transformation is characterized by three essential aspects:

Economy is informational, global, and organized in networks (Castells 2001: 427). These new networks, which Castells describes as a "series of intertwined

knots" (Castells 2001: 428), are organized in various ways: Not only do entire companies join networks, but smaller networks are also created within large companies. They form for specific projects, disband upon completion of the project and merge again with other networks. Due to its temporality, complicity could be described as a particular type of networking; especially, where Castells describes networks as not simply reproducing existing dominant networks, but capable of initiating social change. This is the case when "cultural communities" are created that represent values not covered by any other network. Or when networks "are based on alternative projects […] and build bridges of communication with other networks in society." (Castells 2001: 438) Castells mentions human rights organizations, feminist and ecological movements as examples.

However, he also describes the problems faced by networks. They often find it difficult to coordinate responsibilities, concentrate resources on certain goals, and remain manageable after reaching a certain size. The advantages of dehierarchization thus become a problem, and in this aspect, networks differ from complicity. In contrast to the structure of networks, complicit relationships tend to form much smaller social configurations (cf. Olson 2004: 52f)[4]. It is possible to be part of a network without actually contributing something to it. Complicity, however, requires conscious and active participation. As complicit groups tend to be much smaller, problems in the coordination of responsibilities usually do not occur. Often there is only one representative per function, so conflicts over areas of responsibility are rare. As far as resources are concerned in complicity, the small size of the group usually means that all or most resources are mobilized. So complicity could be defined as an intensification of networking. Undoubtedly Anna Huber and Fritz Hauser and their experimental forms of expression also participate in artistic networks. However, this form of organization is still much too casual. It took complicity to fully solidify the logic of their relationship. And it was the mutual trust, willingness to take risks, the intimacy and

4 The economist Mancur Olsen had provided some interesting research. Empirical data support his thesis that small groups are able to develop an ability to act that can weaken much bigger groups. The reason for this seems to be that large groups are often unable to negotiate a strong common interest. Small groups, however, are often interest groups that can act together as one. Based on research by John James, he writes "that in many different institutions – private as well as public, national as well as local – the 'active' groups and subgroups are usually much smaller [...]. A sample test showed that the average size of an 'active' group was 6.5 members, the average of a 'non-active' group was 14 members." (Olson 2004: 52f)

emotionality of the two that led to the microdynamics, which became the nucleus of a singular artistic form of expression. Anna Huber says:

"On stage, we are linked by invisible threads. We hug before and after the performance, but on stage we hardly have any physical contact at all. Still, we know exactly what the other is doing." (Weber/Ziemer 2007: n.p.)

In a network, it is not necessary to know what the others are doing, for its members work very autonomously. Nor is physical presence necessary, as many of the large digital networks have proven. On stage, however, autonomy is linked to physical interaction with the other person. Factors such as rhythm, synchronization, and dynamics are crucial for the success of complicit processes.

FRIENDSHIP

The final social bond, which I will not go into at much length and which differs from complicity, is friendship. Friendship is directed less at temporality, and more towards duration. In its postmodern form, based on difference rather than similarity (cf. Derrida 1997), it does not end, because of long phases of silence and dissonance. Friendship is meant to endure such non-harmonic phases. Gilles Deleuze describes friendship as a "presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself" (Deleuze 1994: 3). In this concept, which refers back to a fundamental definition of thought, friends primarily articulate themselves as different from one another, they have no shared interests. Their strength lies in the in-between, in the gap, which develops out of their different personalities and behaviors and enables other ways of thinking. Friendship is always unique and it is this very experience of difference, which produces its fascination and a form of sociality beyond institutionalized models of attachment. The power of friendship lies in its purposelessness, which allows for the development of new goals. Friends may accompany us, but rarely do they lead us towards a specific purpose. Friendship does not have to (but can) include compliance. Unlike complicity, it does not have to be practical, as there is nothing to be implemented. Upon beginning their collaboration, Anna Huber and Fritz Hauser did not regard themselves as friends, for they tested everything, which was relevant for them at that point in time in front of an audience. Their complicity does not silence dissonances; these are negotiated productively and lead to a form of expression.

So why can Anna Huber and Fritz Hauser be called accomplices in their production *handundfuss*? The example shows that complicity already begins when an individual form of expression is searched for and hence individual collective working structures established. At the beginning, Anna Huber and Fritz Hauser had no pre-determined goal; they created their own goal and were not able to fall back on already tested group structures. This collaboration was temporary and in its early phase, characterized by intimate, non-public and aimless moments alone in an empty space. It is this conspiratorial moment that distinguishes their complicity from a distanced professional relationship, as we know it from other group formations. The two followed a theatrical principle, which was tactical rather than strategic, although strategic action was not totally negated. Every experienced dancer is also a strategist, who knows, however, when to dance the tactical game in order to create presence. Complicity does not make identity untouchable; it makes it permeable. Once complicity has begun there is no turning back, the shared process of experiencing, learning, and acting is set in motion. Complicity takes place in small group formations, which facilitate active engagement. It is not non-hierarchical, but it plays with hierarchies, which can be altered by the participants in different phases. When complicity is wisely employed, it supports and challenges the idiosyncrasies of the partners where required. Friendship does not necessarily require getting on stage. Complicity, however, includes the presentation of what wants to be presented. Depending on audience participation, complicity is strengthened or loosened. If the reaction is dismissive, complicity usually grows stronger. However, this is not always the case: as in every spy movie, here, too, there are defectors, who may weaken complicity or even end it.

Back to the initial questions: What forms of creating worlds does dance have to offer? Are they special? Or similar in other areas of life? Complicity is a particular form of collective work, which creates specific aesthetic and also social worlds. In dance, the three phases of complicity – decision-making, planning, and realization – are passed through in almost exemplary fashion. Compared to other artistic practices, dance has high situational potential thanks to the element of movement, which requires quick actions and reactions and thus supports situational behavior. This is particularly the case in collectives, who do not simply follow a choreographer's plan, but take on shared responsibility for the outcome. Anna Huber's and Fritz Hauser's unique, temporary and experimental collaboration method is a prime example of complicity. I suspect that the ability to act complicit is also more and more required in other fields of work (cf.

Pongratz/Voß 2004)[5]. Few things can be planned ahead of time and reliably organized, unstable conditions often make it impossible to reproduce team structures, temporary project work makes it necessary to permanently invent new goals, hierarchies are changing, and resources have to be independently obtained. And stepping on a stage is becoming ever more important as a form of presenting results.

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5 Today, instability reveals itself in working lives, whose boundaries are dissolving and which are characterized by self-economization (everyone is an entrepreneur), a high degree of self-discipline (flexible working hours), and growing self-rationalization (everyday life highly determined by technology). This is the conclusion reached by Günter Voß in Hans J. Pongratz/G. Günter Voß: *Typisch Arbeitskraftunternehmer? Befunde empirischer Arbeitsforschung* (2004).

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