

Correspondences

Field, Body, and Material in Contemporary Movement Practices

Daniela Hahn

Drawing inspiration from art and performance, the social anthropologist Tim Ingold puts perception and movement in the center of his thinking about the relatedness between body and environment in fieldwork: both are alive and moving, caught up in continuous transformations and acting upon each other. This emphasis on movement, materiality, and relationality has led him to an understanding of anthropological research as a way of *corresponding* with what is happening around us (Ingold 2014). Correspondence in Ingold's sense does not just simply mean interaction; it is a "going-along-together of flows," a kind of transduction of impulses that go back and forth between body and world. In fieldwork, embodiment and participation call for an "attunement" between the researcher's movements and those of the people and materialities in the field (Lee/Ingold 2006: 67). This is not to say that there is not any distinction or difference between self and other, that everything conflates without difference. Rather, differentiation emerges from the shifting positionality of bodies and materials within the continually unfolding relations between self and other.¹

In this way, Ingold's writings have, among others, fundamentally challenged a conventionalized understanding of the field in anthropology, predicated on the Malinowskian idea of the field as a stable, localized setting inhabited by a territorially fixed cultural "other" whose practices and interactions become the subject of anthropological study. Drawing on Ingold, I am interested in the material, phenomenological, and performative qualities of the field as a living space that is shared by human and non-human materialities. Fields are much more than places

1 From the viewpoint of science studies and queer theory, Karen Barad's work on "posthumanist performativity" has also tackled the practices through which the differential boundaries between humans and non-humans are stabilized and destabilized in what she calls "performative metaphysics" (Barad 2003: 811). Whereas Ingold develops his relational thinking on the basis of the entanglement of perception, movement, and materiality in everyday practices, Barad's well-known notion of "intra-action" seeks to reconfigure the relations between the discursive and the material on an ontological level.

(where actions and movements happen) or sites of ethnographic exploration, affording certain embodied and sensory experiences (Gupta/Ferguson 1997). A field is quite literally constituted through embodied practices of taking place, dwelling, and moving in and with the environment as a “world-in-formation” (Ingold 2007: 11). As such, the field is an event in becoming, performed by the bodies, materials and their correspondences. This is why notions of performing and performance have been used to describe the process of constructing the field in anthropological research (Coleman/Collins 2006). Also emphasizing the performativity inherent in the notion of field, the art historian Elke Bippus (2005) has developed an understanding of the “field” at the intersection of art history, anthropology, and the history of knowledge: as empirical model of knowledge production in-between artistic and scientific practices that implies proximity, embodiment, observation, and self-reflection. In recent years, dancers and choreographers have become more and more interested in the material and phenomenological qualities of the field as a living space that is shared by human and non-human materialities. Particularly in processes of artistic research and contemporary site-specific movement practices, ethnographic fieldwork has become a major methodological and theoretical point of reference. This is because both anthropological fieldwork and site-specific practices rely on modes of embodiment, participation, and observation in order to elucidate the correspondences between body and the material world.

In the following, I seek to explore how the concept of the “field” as material and relational practice in outdoor performances might enable certain kinds of experiences and knowledges to emerge that would otherwise be blocked off. Investigating the interconnectedness between bodies and materials in contemporary dance could thus contribute not only to discourses engaging with (non-human) materialities in dance contexts, but also to current theoretical debates on the relationship between anthropology and ethnography. By raising questions regarding the interconnectedness of the human body with the environment and the inquiry into materials through sensory perception and movement practice, explorations of contemporary dance could become points of departure for creating new dialogues between dance and anthropology: How is the body moved by the material worlds it inhabits? In which ways is the field performed in and through movement practice? What arises choreographically from the attention to and engagement with the materialities of the environment? These are questions that, in different ways, the movement artist and artistic researcher Paula Kramer and the choreographer and dancer Simo Kellokumpu have taken up in their work. As artist-researchers, both are interested in exploring the resonances and correspondences between human body and material environment. In a necessarily fragmentary attempt to present their approaches, I am following the question of how the moving body who partakes of the material world does engage with that world and what kind of potential this kind of engagement yields for the production of knowledge.

Paula Kramer: Exposure

Movement practice and performance give us the possibility to attend to materials through the body instead of just thinking and speaking about them. Even though Kramer did not exactly put it that way, this is what stuck with me after an interview I conducted with her in June 2018. Ever since we first met in 2013, during the workshop “A Meadow Meander,” chaired by theatre and performance scholar Baz Kershaw (which was part of a series of events entitled “Ecology and the Arts,” held at Freie Universität Berlin), I remained curious about her research on materiality with and through (outdoor) movement practice. This research manifests itself in the form of workshops, performances, and publications. By drawing on her practical work as a movement artist and dancer, influenced by Amerta Movement, as well as on recent theoretical writings on materialities and material agency, Kramer develops experimental artistic research practices to explore the body’s relationship to the material world through exposure (Kramer 2016). Expanding one’s awareness and susceptibility for the sensory and affective conditions of both body and context or field plays a significant part in her work.

Her practice is site-specific and most often based on extended periods of engaging with a distinct location. She chooses her working sites for both pragmatic reasons such as accessibility and availability as well as for specific qualities that appeal to her in an affective, more or less conscious manner, and the associations, memories, and affective responses they bring about. Working with what is already on site includes attending to the site’s own historicity and its present conditions, and rather than to immediately or predominantly acting upon it, to first make contact, listen, and follow. “Going into the field” thus describes both a process of “being led along” (Kramer/Longley 2015: 3), of tracing the material and affective qualities of the site that change over time as well as speaking to, with and from the site through movement and performance practice.

Methodologically, Kramer’s practice is impacted by procedures of artistic research as well as informed by ethnographic methods such as participant observation, fieldnote writing, interviews, and documentation. In our interview, Kramer spoke of the relationship between her practice and ethnographic fieldwork as a kind of kinship relation, nevertheless stressing an existing difference between her work in the field, based on embodied movement practices, and ethnographic fieldwork proper. Even though ethnographic fieldwork involves the observation of other bodies, the ethnographer’s body that is – as subject – in the field does traditionally not at the same time figure as an object of the research.

Instead of a purely theory driven exploration of our relationship to the material world, Kramer’s work insists on putting one’s body in direct physical contact with things, objects and materials of one’s immediate environment. This contact

offers sources for practice, performance, and writing. In our interview, she described her approach in the following words:

In a way I always try to create situations in which also one's own material can speak, because, ultimately, I understand the dialogue to be "intermaterial": between materials on site and my material. In order to achieve that, I also have to make my material available, with everything that I have to offer. And part of that is simply to practice to be outdoors and in contact with materials and not lose myself in this process. But it is also about taking up an internal attitude, one that allows me to think possible that materials act on me and not just the other way around. [...] This is why I like exposure so much, because, for me, it emphasizes: you put yourself out there.²

There are, at least, two aspects about this statement that I find interesting: the term intermateriality and the reflection on the conditions of contact it implies. The term "intermateriality" that Kramer engages with points to the body as material in correspondence with materials of different orders that are not stable or inert, but, like the body of the dancer, in flux, in transformation, alive. Kramer's practice shows a double character of the intermaterial relationship: Our bodies are enmeshed with the environment, they are and become entangled with its materials – rocks, water, walls, trees, soil, noise, grass, rain, wind and so on – but at the same time they remain separate from it, for example through being of a different material, a different temperature, a different speed. Thus, creating "intermaterial" relationships does not imply the dissolution of all difference; rather, it means establishing interactive correspondences with differentiation.

In Kramer's work, these correspondences are triggered not only through contact with tangible properties of diverse materials. Sensory experiences and movement responses are also elicited through histories, memories, and previous encounters associated with materials. What becomes noticeable or possible, in her view, also has a relation to an "internal attitude" that is based on, for example, relaxing one's concepts and tuning into one's capacities of sensory awareness and receptivity as well as one's sense of having and being a material form (Kramer 2018). Exposure – subtle and rough at the same time – allows for an attunement between these two and for material resonances to occur. This, of course, fundamentally challenges the concept of how movement material for performance works emerges. Rather than composing a sequence of movement from an idea, the materials of a performance emerge from creating and allowing for a dialogue between body, things, objects, and materials to happen as well as from the experience of being and moving in relation: "how I am positioned, how does it feel, how do I

2 Interview with Paula Kramer, conducted on June 15th, 2018, in Berlin.

move on, what am I made of.” (Kramer 2015: 114) At the same time, attending to the properties of materials with our body and allowing them to impact our movement choices and qualities also challenges the ways in which we speak and write about our relationship to the environment, also academically. The knowledge that is produced through these correspondences is somatic, experiential, relational, and potentially leads to a writing sensible enough to register movement across a broad spectrum of materials, origins and kinds by attending to the environment as co-composer of movement and choreography and by imbuing descriptions with physical and sensory experiences from the encounters in the field.

In this way, Kramer’s physical practice also leads to a re-thinking of the relationship between moving and writing (Kramer/Longley 2015). Fieldnotes and field-drawings do not only constitute a means of documentation or capturing the immediate; they perform tracings, noticings, as one could say, of the correspondence between body and world. Kramer’s practice can be understood as an auto-ethnographic practice, since it – on a narrative level – reflects on her situatedness in relation to and interaction with the materialities of the field and concentrates “on the body as the site from which the story is generated” (Spry 2001: 708). At the same time, it goes beyond auto-ethnographic writing since it critiques an anthropocentric concept of writing, emanating solely from the human body. Moving and writing thus correspond through their correspondence with the material world.

Simo Kellokumpu: Negotiation

The critique of an understanding of choreography as mastering movement marks the point of departure for Simo Kellokumpu’s investigation into the relations between body and environment. At the heart of his artistic practice, which he also developed in the framework of his practice-based PhD research, lies a shift of position: from the choreographer to the *choreoreader* – a shift based on reconceptualizing the relationship between performer and material surroundings (Kellokumpu 2016, 2017). Rather than exploring how the human body moves, Kellokumpu’s practice focuses on the movements surrounding the body, the conditions, and circumstances for human movement – on different scales and in terms of different visibilities: from the cellular level, to movements of everyday objects to spatial directions, gravity and even to planetary and intergalactic movements. How does the body “take place” when the living condition surrounding the body is in constant movement? And how do these movements, conditions, and experiences choreograph the human body? In an interview,³ he stated that

3 Interview with Simo Kellokumpu, conducted on June 8th, 2017, in Hamburg.

what I try to achieve is to become transparent, to become invisible in a way, that my practice is not a human-centered practice. It is about noticing that there are all these movements around me, which are surrounding my body, which are choreographing me, so then I just try to recognize those forces and those affects and to be with them differently.

By drawing on reading theories from literary studies, Kellokumpu describes his practice of “choreoreading” as an act of decoding the surrounding movements that set conditions for the choreographic proposal to emerge. This changes the operative agencies as it decentralizes the conventional hierarchies of the human body in relation to the surroundings. Choreography as a reading practice relies on attention, embodiment, and imagination and operates on different scales. The field becomes the concrete, but also imaginary sphere in which this interconnect-edness takes place. The sphere materializes as an organization of movement and the body, but in a different way than Rudolf von Laban’s kinesphere which defines the personal movement space of a body as primarily spatial and geometrical relations.

Instead of looking for signs and symbols to be understood semantically, choreoreading means to register forces, energies, and affects that flow between body and environment. As a non-linear atmospheric practice, it encompasses the sensing, processing, and responding to the conditions surrounding the body; it is analytical, embodied and affective at the same time. “I try to be more like a guest,” he said in our interview, “and to recognize the invitation, but how does it invite me? Does it invite me or not? Or does it invite me to engage instead of making a decision. [...] Then my agency is different in a way.” The fieldwork dimension in Kellokumpu’s work resides exactly in this position of the guest who observes and analyzes the material and social conditions of which he is part. However, instead of asking what materials are, Kellokumpu is interested in what materials do and how they move. “Materials are what they do” (Ingold 2014: 70). The practice thus consists of a negotiation between what the materials do and what the body does: “It’s not enough to say that this is a chair. Meanwhile I go through the proprioceptive curves and angles of my body, I am negotiating with the chair obviously in the practice.”

In Kellokumpu’s work, the choreographic process couples the attention to the becoming of the material world we seek to know with epistemological strategies of getting to know the materials and conditions in which the body takes place through attention, negotiation, and imagination. He reminds us that the construction of a field goes hand in hand with the construction of subjects and patterns of power and domination, also in a political way. Furthermore, the practice of choreoreading feeds into a practice of writing and documenting through different media that not only seeks to articulate the negotiations between materials

and body, but also produces imaginaries about those relations. And according to Ingold, to describe the relations to materials and their properties means to tell their stories (Ingold 2007). In this way, Kellokumpu's embodied practice as attentional engagement to materials extends to a practice of negotiation in language: "in terms of finding words and vocabulary for the practice. Then the common denominator is how to experiment with writing, how to find ways to go beyond the linear syntax or grammar or just trying to bring unexpected words together, or the practice proposes that these two come together."

Modes of Attending

Exposure and negotiation are (partly overlapping) modes of attending to the material world and its correspondences with the body in and through movement practice. Kramer's and Kellokumpu's practices share a mode of inquiry which embraces artistic and theoretical investigation. In different ways, both explore the resonances between contemporary movement practices, artistic research, and methods of anthropological fieldwork. Their choreographic work emerges in active partnership with the materials of the field. However, whereas Ingold focuses primarily on the correspondences between body and material environment, Kramer and Kellokumpu also bring moments of non-correspondence into view: when materials resist negotiation, remain separated or alien, or potentially harm the body. But even though the human body is part of the environment and, in the process, also becomes a medium and object of research, it does not take center stage. As an entangled practice, fieldwork in dance allows for a being together differently. It is not my intention here to portray outdoor dance practices as close to nature, thereby proposing a neo-romantic aestheticization of nature, or to idealize them as being "more ecological" than the work in the studio. Rather, it is my contention that Kramer's and Kellokumpu's practices, each in their own way, can be understood as contributions to sensory ethnography that address the (methodological) challenge of a self-reflective approach to issues of embodiment, materiality, and sensory experiences in anthropological fieldwork. At the same time, their work could be a starting point for the exploration of a concept of dance ethnography from the perspective of artistic research.

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