

# “PINA”: Pioneer, icon, myth, brand

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When Pina Bausch took over as the ballet director of the municipal Wuppertaler Bühnen theater in 1973, she and her company – who would later go on to become world-famous as the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, so the official name – presented things unlike anything anybody had ever seen before: dancers coughing as they danced; dancing in flip-flops, rubber boots and high heels, with fins on their feet and branches on their heads; jumping, writhing and running through water and soil, over carnations and stones; speaking, shrieking, giggling, yawning, sleeping and smoking cigarettes; hitting, flirting with and screaming at each other; frying eggs on an electric iron, making sandwiches for the audience, offering them tea and showing them family photos; wrapping themselves in rugs, lolling around on pillows, jumping into mountains of flowers and climbing up walls. The Tanztheater Wuppertal broke with a multitude of traditions, a departure from the familiar so bold and astonishing that it divided both audiences and critics alike: they were either fascinated and delighted to witness the emergence of something akin to radical change in more than just the aesthetics of dance, or they were shocked and angered, sometimes loudly venting their rage and storming out of the auditorium.

In many countries, the 1970s were a time of great social tension. In West Germany, the student movement or “Generation 68” set out to radically transform the politics, society and culture of silent, conservative, postwar (West) Germany. While Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt’s slogan “Dare More Democracy” attempted to stay abreast of these changes, the activities of the far-left militant organization, the Red Army Fraction (RAF), sent shockwaves through the country. What Pina Bausch and her company brought to the Wuppertal stage amidst this troubled political atmosphere was undoubtedly daring. For their art was an aesthetic revolt, fundamentally rattling the paradigms of both theater and dance: there was no narrative dramaturgy, there were no storylines, no scenes, no conventional choreographic rules or work processes, no orthodox dance techniques, no leotards, no classical scenery, no librettos, no preselected or illustrative music.

These radical innovations were part and parcel of more expansive changes taking place throughout the art world – changes that had been breaking fresh ground since the 1960s in dance and theater: the aesthetic radicalism of Merce Cunningham and Judson Dance Theater in the USA, provocative new performance art aesthetics in Europe, the advent of German dance theater (Tanztheater), which emerged at the same time at the Tanzforum Cologne in the late 1960s, and the radical theater of Peter Stein and Peter Zadek. But Pina Bausch's pieces, developed out of the unwavering perspective of a dancer, broke with established theater conventions, previous understandings of dance and customary viewing habits, in what were yet again different ways: never before had anyone so radically questioned the concepts of both dance and theater, and never before had anyone so unconditionally declared the acts of speaking, singing or screaming, simple gestures and everyday habits and emotions, the movements of animals, plants, materials and objects to be dance and, as such, choreographically transformed them. The dance theater of Pina Bausch appeared to push the boundaries of all previous genres, aesthetic categories and perceptions.

Over the course of her more than 35-year long career, Pina Bausch went on to develop 44 choreographies with the Tanztheater Wuppertal. Some were considered masterpieces of the century, such as *The Rite of Spring* from 1975. In the late 1970s, the company began touring worldwide and, to this day – more than ten years after the death of its choreographer – the company is still almost ritually revered in many cities, countries and cultures. Be it in Japan, Brazil, India, Argentina, Chile, France, Italy or Hungary, Pina Bausch is often considered an important precursor to new and contemporary, national and regional developments in dance. But there is more to the extensive reputation of Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal than their pieces, which feature dancers as distinct individuals, and the company's long history of collective collaboration. What has been imitated and modified worldwide is also and in particular the Tanztheater's open and inquisitive method of asking questions, which it has transformed into an innovative artistic work process. Thanks to the international coproductions, which began with *Viktor* in 1986 and would take the company to 15 different coproducing locations in the following 23 years, this method took on intercultural relevance. The company engaged in comprehensive research trips to examine people's everyday lives, their cultures and customs, their habits and rituals, their dance and music. But the pieces also incorporated the magic and beauty of nature: stones, water, earth, plants, trees and animals were all given their own space on the stage – in an age in which ecological destruction and climate change were already noticeably present. The coproductions themselves were pioneering

feats in their own right, for these research trips began long before “artistic research” became a hotly contested topic of artistic and academic discourse in the 1990s.

For Pina Bausch, dance was the medium through which to explore human nature – and her dancers provided her with the material she needed. As an anthropologist of dance, she was a translator. She motivated her dancers to discover gestures, bodily practices and everyday rhythms in different cultures, to find and artistically transform the claviature of the human in everyday life. In her pieces, she took this material and set both the similarities and cultural differences fundamental to it in relation to each other. The success of her cultural-anthropological research was also due to the way in which she deliberately selected the members of her company. Coming from up to 20 different nations, all of her dancers contributed different languages, degrees of experience and artistic habitus; they each dealt differently with what they experienced and discovered on their journeys due to their biographical backgrounds. Pina Bausch’s pieces, like her rare interviews and speeches, reveal an artist deeply convinced that there is a *conditio humana* inherent to all people, no matter their skin color, gender, age or class. Her work searches for and reveals not that which separates us, but rather what connects us to each other – as well as to nature, plants and other animals.

On June 30, 2009, Pina Bausch died at the age of 68. By this point, she was already a living legend and had been showered with a range of significant awards. Today’s ‘Pina’ reflects many desires: she is a pioneer, an icon, a myth, a brand. More than ten years after her death, young theater and dance audiences mainly know Pina Bausch and her Tanztheater Wuppertal as historical figures, pioneers of the past, as a bygone, already largely forgotten period of 1970s German dance theater. But Tanztheater Wuppertal performances still sell out worldwide. The company has now become one of the few globally touring dance ensembles that larger audiences, even those that are not very familiar with dance, feel that they need to have seen at least once. There is a desire to marvel at the cultural object, the intangible cultural heritage. Even though this seems like musealization, it also means that Pina Bausch’s art lives on: there are many artists, not only in dance but also in theater, film and other artistic fields, who have been influenced by her. To this day, we find fragments of her aesthetics either consciously and purposefully or unconsciously and unwittingly referenced in many works of dance and theater. Much of what she invented in her pieces has unwaveringly found its way directly, albeit in distorted or deconstructed form, into the canon of contemporary aesthetics, which means that it is still topical. The aesthetics and some of the typical movements and scenes from Pina Bausch’s pieces are now so taken for granted that their origins are often overlooked or forgotten.

With the death of the choreographer, Pina Bausch and her dance theater entered the annals of dance history. But her work still lives on: in restagings, adaptations and variations of past productions, and in acts of 'passing on' roles to younger dancers and pieces to other companies. It lives on in ways that have been much discussed, applauded and disputed in artistic circles, and that must and should be provided with an institutional framework, funding and security.

### **Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal: The dance productions**

There has already been much published in many languages about Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal: interviews, essays and academic, semi-academic and general interest articles, as well as books, photo collections, films and tv documentaries. As in the artistic works dealing with her oeuvre, many of these publications have and are confronted with the problem that access to materials about Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal has hitherto been almost completely blocked, meaning that authors have been unable to reference primary sources and have had to make do with the few existing secondary sources. It is above all due to this difficult situation that the interpretations of Pina Bausch's art first established in the 1970s and 1980s have been constantly reproduced and 'codified' over decades, although the choreographer herself began changing her aesthetic in the 1990s. Not only has discourse on Pina Bausch's art now established itself accordingly across the globe, but this situation has also created a myth about her early years while simultaneously turning the name 'Pina,' formerly only used by her own inner circle, into a global trademark.

This book proposes taking a different, new perspective, shifting the focus away from the choreographer and specific pieces and instead examining the artistic productions of the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch. In this book, the term 'production' is defined as the interplay between the work process (the development of a piece, its restagings, the passing on of material), the piece in question and its performances, as well as its reception. This book explores this interplay by focusing on the 15 international coproductions, which it analyzes together for the first time.

### **My research process**

In 1976, when I was still just a high school student, I saw a piece by Pina Bausch in Wuppertal for the very first time. Like many people of my generation who were excited about dance, it affected me deeply.

During the 1980s, dance theater became an important part of the research for my dissertation *FrauenKörperTanz: Eine Zivilisationsgeschichte des Tanzes*,<sup>1</sup> which discussed the relationship between women's history, the history of the body and the history of dance from the perspectives of both cultural theory and social history. During the 2000s, I explored Pina Bausch's *The Rite of Spring* together with Gabriele Brandstetter. We were looking at how to approach the piece and its performance methodologically while specifically focusing on the company's practices of restaging and passing on material over decades.<sup>2</sup> This book picks up where I left off back then. I began working on it in 2011 with a preliminary study, followed by a four-year research grant provided by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from 2013. It was the first externally funded research project to take place in cooperation with the Pina Bausch Foundation. The project was moreover supported by various branches of the Goethe-Institut and other funding programs in the countries where Tanztheater Wuppertal pieces were coproduced.

Thanks to these collaborations, I was able to draw on extraordinary, new and at that point untouched empirical material, such as recordings of performances and the paratexts of the choreographies, which the Pina Bausch Foundation made available to the project from the archives, which had not yet been cataloged at the time. I analyzed visual and written documentation of rehearsals, some of which I generated myself during my own visits and some of which was given to me by Tanztheater Wuppertal dancers. The research project also gave us the opportunity to collect other empirical material such as audience surveys, which the Tanztheater Wuppertal allowed us to conduct for the very first time. Detailed interviews with dancers, with patrons of the company at the various Goethe-Institut offices and with associated artists, collaborators, friends and partners of Pina Bausch worldwide helped us to gain more insight into how the pieces had been created and received in a way that went beyond what was already known and had been described by others before me. In addition, I read thousands of reviews and hundreds of texts, interviews and speeches by and about Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal.

In order to grasp the work process, the Tanztheater Wuppertal's research trips, the performance conditions in each respective city and country, and audience reactions, I undertook several research trips myself, which led me to India, Japan, Brazil, New York, Paris, Budapest, Lisbon and frequently to Wuppertal. In Kolkata, I heard various accounts of why the Tanztheater Wuppertal's first tour of India had failed, while the second one firmly established the myth of Pina Bausch and her company. In Kochi, I stayed at the same hotel that Pina Bausch had visited. I listened to the gentle sounds

of the palm trees and began to understand why the India piece *Bamboo Blues* was so gentle and peaceful – for some disconcertingly so – a heterotopia in a country marked by such incomprehensible suffering and misery. In Budapest, the capital city of the *Wiesenland*, Hungary, I visited the flea markets where the dancers had collected all kinds of bric-a-brac during their research trip there and spoke with many artists and companions on the same weekend that Viktor Orban closed Hungary's borders due to the so-called "refugee crisis," initiating a momentous turning point in the history of the European Union. In Brazil, I was astonished to find that – unlike in Germany – there was a young generation of dancers and dance researchers who saw no contradiction between contemporary dance and dance theater. In Japan, I was fascinated by the passionate, empathetic way that young artists and academics spoke about Pina Bausch and her influence on Japan's nascent dance scene. This motivated me to go beyond these singular conversations and interview the audience after a Tokyo performance of *The Rite of Spring*.

In each of the countries that I visited, I had wonderful encounters with people who provided me and my research with a lot of help and support, as did colleagues in various municipal, state and dance archives, in particular the staff of the Tanztheater Wuppertal und the Pina Bausch Foundation. To them all I owe my thanks. They are mentioned in detail further below.

### **The praxeology of translation: A new approach to dance theory**

The theoretical framework of this book is a theory of translation that I developed into a 'praxeology of translation' during the research process. The term 'translation' is not used here in the usual linguistic sense, but is rather defined as a cultural practice in the same vein as in translation studies and postcolonial studies. The basic proposition is that acts of translation are fundamental to artistic work processes and creations. In this book, translation is presented, firstly, as a central artistic practice (in dance) and, secondly, as a fundamental research concept in the field of dance studies. A dance production is thus a permanent, complex process of translation: between speaking and moving, moving and writing, between different languages and cultures, between various media and materials, between knowledge and perception, between company members developing a piece or passing it on, between performance and audience, between piece and dance review, between artistic and academic practice.

This book outlines a praxeology of translation. It does not inquire into what the translation of or in dance is, but rather demonstrates how processes of translation characterize a dance production.

This *how* focuses on the manner of translation, i.e., on its practices. This praxeological perspective is not only new in discourse on the theory of translation in the fields of cultural and social theory but also in the field of dance research. In this book, I illuminate its historical, cultural, media, aesthetic, interactive and physical aspects.

This volume is based on empirical research. From a methodological standpoint, research that focuses not only on the pieces but on the entire dance production – in other words on the interplay between work processes, collaboration, the piece itself, its performance and its reception – cannot merely rely on conventional analytical tools and methods from theater and dance studies such as performance, dance or choreographic analysis. For this reason, during my research, I developed the methodological approach of what I call ‘praxeological production analysis,’ which forms the methodological basis of the analyses and whose framework and methodological concept will be elucidated toward the end of this book. ‘Praxeological production analysis’ describes a method that neither exclusively analyzes the performance or specific staging nor concentrates on the audience, as is often the case in sociological art research. Instead, the focus is on the relationality of work process, piece, performance and reception. The suitability of this perspective becomes particularly evident in the case of a company such as the Tanztheater Wuppertal, as several generations of dancers have restaged its pieces over the course of decades and then presented them to different audiences in different countries and cultures. As a method, praxeological production analysis attempts to do this justice by addressing the entanglement between work process, piece, performance and reception, but by grasping them abstractly using the concept of translation. In doing so, praxeological production analysis makes use of different methodological procedures: empirical social research from the fields of cultural anthropology and sociology (ethnography, quantitative and qualitative interview techniques), analytical methods from theater and dance studies (performance and choreographic analysis), methods from media studies (video analysis), content analysis and hermeneutic methods.

This book brings together the extensive body of material<sup>3</sup> that I generated and examined during my research, while pursuing the reciprocal strategy of embedding the material within the framework of a praxeology of translation while in turn attempting to refine and activate this framework using the empirical material. By making use of the theoretical concept of translation, the methodological approach of praxeological production analysis and a comprehensive corpus of material, this book develops a new reading of the art of Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal. By using this prominent example, it seeks to encourage debate in dance research

about the theoretical concepts and methodological considerations that arose during my research process. This scholarly approach is one way of gaining a deeper understanding of what is linguistically ‘incomprehensible,’ of that which defies translation (not only) in the art of Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal.

This experiential research process not only meant mastering mountains of very different kinds of material, it also required me to constantly question my own position as such and in relation to my field of research. It was important to reflect on the roles of proximity and distance, of empathy and criticism, as well as of art and scholarship, specifically: of practices in the artistic and academic fields. The research process spanned many years and produced social relationships that also included friendships. This took a balancing act: on the one hand, my research was only possible due to my expanding curiosity but, on the other hand, it was vital for me to curb my scholarly interest somewhat when it came to the ethical foundations of research, such as data protection and the privacy of dialogue partners. I wanted the contacts that I established to become mutually rewarding relationships for everyone involved.

Alongside these issues of research ethics, I also had to address the different logics of art and academia. Scholarly research – its theoretical and methodological tools and practices, its specific pace, language and media – generally adheres to a different logic than that of artistic work. Again, I faced the fundamental problem of transfer: how can this material be translated into writing? This book is in itself an attempt at translation, at finding a theoretical language for aesthetic practices. That this attempt at translation will have its limitations and will inevitably fail to bridge the gap between aesthetic practice and discourse is a fact embedded within the foundations of translation itself.

### **Architecture of this book**

This book is designed not to be linear, but rather modular. The individual chapters *PIECES*, *COMPANY*, *WORK PROCESS*, *SOLO DANCE* and *RECEPTION* each deal with one aspect of a dance production. The chapter *THEORY AND METHODOLOGY* explains the book’s theoretical and methodological principles. The final chapter discusses Pina Bausch’s oeuvre in terms of its contemporaneity. All chapters conceptually and stylistically reflect the topic and the material that they deal with. They are translated and structured accordingly: to be essayistic, analytical or theoretical.

Instead of adhering to a chronological concept, the chapter *PIECES* takes the systematic approach of describing and interpreting select pieces. Pina Bausch’s pieces are classified into artistic phases.

These artistic phases are then described and characteristic aspects of the artistic work established, going beyond the specific pieces. Finally, these aspects are placed within their respective historical, social and political contexts. This also provides answers to a question rarely posed in research about the Tanztheater Wuppertal: what is the relationship between various phases in Pina Bausch's work and both specific historical events and contemporaneous artistic developments? In other words: are these events and developments translated into the pieces and, if so, in what ways?

The chapter *COMPANY* focuses on the Tanztheater Wuppertal as a social figuration. It is the first time that biographies of its members have been presented together. It details Pina Bausch's view of her dancers and vice versa, while also inquiring into forms of collaboration, everyday routines, individual perspectives on shared work and the bonds that have tied and held the group together over so many years and decades.

The chapter *WORK PROCESS* deals with the company's artistic work processes and presents them as practices of translation. They include rehearsals during the development of pieces, especially as they relate to the "research trips" to coproducing cities and countries, and how the pieces and the different roles have been passed on to young dancers at the Tanztheater Wuppertal and to other dance companies.

The translation of body/dance into writing/text is the main topic of the chapter *SOLO DANCE*. Three select solos, one by Anne Martin in *Viktor* (PREMIERE 1986), one by Beatrice Libonati in *Masurca Fogo* (PREMIERE 1998) and one by Dominique Mercy in "...como el mosquito en la piedra, ay si, si, si..." (PREMIERE 2009) are presented with the help of the digital notation software Feldpartitur.

The chapter *RECEPTION* adopts the perspective of viewers and inquires into the relationship between piece, performance, perception and knowledge. It examines the ways in which dance critics have made reference to Pina Bausch's pieces over the years and decades while also looking at what audiences expect of a piece after 40 years of the Tanztheater Wuppertal, how they perceive the performance and put that perception into words.

The chapter *THEORY AND METHODOLOGY* provides a theoretical and methodological framework. It introduces the main characteristics of a praxeology of translation as well as the methodological fundamentals of praxeological production analysis. It then uses these theoretical and methodological concepts as a backdrop to once more reflect on the previously described translation processes in dance productions.

The final chapter focuses on the temporalities of translation and examines them in relation to the concept of contemporaneity.

It asks whether the pieces of the Tanztheater Wuppertal should only be regarded as performed historical documents, as is the case for some classical ballet pieces, or whether, with their multiple processes of translation and the accompanying entanglements between different temporalities, they are actually an indication of what can be considered contemporary at all.

## Gratitude

This book is my attempt to translate the extraordinary work of Pina Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal into words and to grasp it within a scholarly context. Moreover, by processing this extensive corpus of material, it is also my attempt to introduce 'translation' as a central concept to describe artistic creation and performance in globalized and interconnected societies. It was my academic work on a multicultural and multinational, intergenerational and internationally touring, world-famous dance company that gave rise to this concept of translation. The work of Pina Bausch and her company – their rehearsals, the way they develop pieces and performances, their various forms of collaboration and solidarity – have allowed me to demonstrate this understanding of translation.

All her life, Pina Bausch remained convinced that dance cannot be put into words, that it stands for itself and must be experienced and felt. She still held this opinion when conceptual dance began deconstructing previous contemporary dance forms in the 1990s, resulting in growing academic and theoretical discourse about dance. This skepticism, which Pina Bausch probably would have felt in relation to my endeavor to academically translate her work and which some of her companions still share, accompanied me on every page. The reputed paradox between dance and text was already inherent to my doctoral thesis. But while I largely assumed at the time that the text leads to a loss of the aesthetic, I would like to show in this book that there is also something to be gained by translating art into scholarship, the aesthetic into the discursive, dance into text. It can broaden our understanding and the impact of both by allowing for new forms of perception, new perspectives and interpretations – and by provoking art to live on in the process.

During this research, it was a great and crucial desire of mine to work with the artists about whom I am writing. Since I only came into contact with the Pina Bausch Foundation, which was founded and is now run by her son Salomon Bausch, shortly after Pina Bausch's death, I did not have the chance to directly communicate with Pina Bausch herself for this book. Nevertheless, I had the unforgettable opportunity to accompany the reinvention of the Tanztheater Wuppertal during a precarious and fragile, but important

phase, and in my many conversations, I experienced the Tanztheater Wuppertal as a special, unparalleled group of artists. This book is therefore not only about Pina Bausch, the legendary choreographer but also very much about the ensemble, its individual members and their translation achievements.

I therefore express my gratitude first and foremost to the company: to the dancers, collaborators, friends and partners who patiently made time for me and with whom I was able to have long, intense, frank and touching conversations. I am grateful to Marion Cito, Peter Pabst, Matthias Burkert und Andreas Eisenschneider for providing me with insights into their own biographies. Raimund Hoghe helped me to better understand the 1980s, when he was a dramaturge at the Tanztheater Wuppertal, while Norbert Servos provided me with a deeper understanding of his interpretation of Pina Bausch's pieces. I thank Robert Sturm and Ursula Popp for their fantastic support and their many tips and insights into various written and visual documents. I am also grateful to the Tanztheater Wuppertal for allowing me to attend rehearsals and for having enough confidence in me to allow me to conduct the first-ever audience surveys in Wuppertal. I wish to thank the Pina Bausch Foundation for our many excellent years of collaboration, a first careful step on the part of the newly created institution toward collaborating with academia. Finally, above all, I wish to thank Salomon Bausch for placing the necessary trust in me.

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