

epistemic situation is founded on colonial knowledge and nuclear tests, as Halpern has shown.

Since infrastructures (including universities) are made to ensure the repetition of processes, operations, and positions, and only become visible in case of a lack or error, media-critical practices perhaps become even more relevant for introducing questions about gender and ethnicity in order to evoke differentials, deviations, and errors of the infrastructure that are perceived as epistemologically constitutive and taken serious as such.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the relationality of infrastructures brings up the question of whether these have an affective dimension beyond their mere functions as service architecture and can therefore serve as a basis for new social relations. Can there be a new shared care in relating to media conditions that take the *non-innocent* situation as a starting point to perform new politics of media and therefore of knowledge?

**Maximilian Haas**  
**in conversation with**  
**Alice Chauchat, Gradinger / Schubot**  
**and Jeremy Wade**

**How to Relate in**  
**Contemporary Dance?**

“How to relate?” is not at all a secondary question to the practice of contemporary dance – as if there were movement first that could then relate to something or not. Rather – mediated through bodies, through affect, sensing, imagination, rules, etc. – this question might even form the core of the artistic process through which dance emerges. While the notion of choreography is usually tied to a post/structuralist conception of *writing* dance – inventing choreographic languages and iterative texts to be interpreted first by the dancers and then by the spectators – the notion of dance is conceived of as a corporeal and situational artistic practice, which organizes and stratifies itself according to that which (with dance theorist Erin Manning) can be called “relationscapes.”<sup>1</sup> While choreography is thus primarily concerned with form and meaning, dance is functionally contingent on the factors and parameters

<sup>15</sup> Graham, Stephen and Thrift, Nigel, “Out of Order: Understanding Repair and Maintenance,” in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2007, pp. 1–25.

<sup>1</sup> Manning, Erin, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy*. Cambridge, MA 2009.

to which it relates. The result, however, is by no means arbitrary; rather it depends on the artist's selection of relata and modes of relating. Yet while choreography and dance are inseparable in a performance situation – you can't have one without the other – a shift of focus between the two might lead to entirely different results, both in the production and the critical reception of movement-based performances. In making such a shift towards dance, the following text aims to disclose and unfold associated practices in the contemporary field through conversations about the respective relata and the modes of relating that organize the artistic process of four dance makers.

Alice Chauchat, Jeremy Wade, and the artist duo Jared Gradinger and Angela Schubot all live and work in Berlin, come more or less from the same generation, and share a similar dance-educational background. Yet their dance aesthetics and working methods differ in significant ways, being centered around different relata and modes of relation. Gradinger/Schubot's latest series focused on plants as inspiration and partners in movement creation. Alice Chauchat's recent works use scores to organize transindividual movement dependencies within groups of people that marginalize the expression of the dancing individual as well as the attempt to choreograph a (merely) good dance. Jeremy Wade's dance performances evolve around that which cannot be identified: the incomprehensible, untenable now and queer futurities in the making.

I presented the same questionnaire to all three of them: a list in which the big question of how to relate in contemporary dance was subdivided into thirteen smaller questions, organized in four sections.

#### How to relate in Contemporary Dance? An Interview-pastiche

- Whom or what do you relate to in your choreographic work? (You might name the most important entities first.)
- How do you relate to these entities? What are the means of relating? How do you approach them?
- What do they do to you?
- What do they make you do?
- What is in it for them?
- How does the particular environment or situation influence the relation?
- How does the spectator or audience influence the relation?
- How does the relation evolve or transform over time?
- To what extent is the relationship based on knowledge? Can you describe the forms of knowledge?
- Does the relation produce a certain form of knowledge? And if so, what about?
- Can the relation fail? And if so, how?
- Do you experience the process of relating as an appropriation or a mediation of the other? (Both? How?)
- How is power and authority distributed in these relations? Does violence play a part here?

Due to the questions' general nature, it was the addressees who had to approach them, not the other way around. The way these choreographers have done this itself speaks to their respective relation to relation and their modes of relating. In their significant differences of focus and approach, the positions of Chauchat, Gradinger/Schubot, and Wade might form a spectrum of aesthetic, methodological, and epistemological answers to the question of how to relate in contemporary dance.

### Alice Chauchat

#### How to relate in contemporary dance?

Alice Chauchat's dance practice takes shape in various contexts: teaching, research, writing, performance production, and somatic practices. While this characterization tends to be a commonplace in the field of contemporary dance, in this case it touches on a quite essential feature of her work that cuts through these contexts as one and the same practice. Chauchat's work is mainly concerned with the practical definition and modification of scores that establish complex interdependencies between forms of performing and perceiving dance, moving and watching. While the titles of these scores – *Dancing as a Way of Listening*, *Unison as a Matter of Fact*, or *Telepathic Dance* – may suggest rather simple tasks, the way they are formulated and implemented actually leads to challenging problems around which the concept and practice of dance needs to be reconfigured. As the scores unfold transversally, a university seminar can also be a rehearsal for a dance production, provided that some professional performers are present with the students, together with an interested lay public. Chauchat's task-based methodology therefore bridges not only between various people, rehearsal and performance, dancer and spectator, but also between institutional practices. It thus inhabits and thickens the relations between those elements constituting the field of contemporary dance.

The conversation took place in June 2019 during lunch on the terrace of a café in Wedding, directly opposite the Uferstudios, where Chauchat teaches as a guest professor at the HZT, the Inter-University Centre of Dance Berlin, and where she rehearsed for the group piece *Ensembling* that premiered in August of the same year.

#### Haas Who or what do you relate in your choreographic work?

Chauchat The answer to this question depends on the perspective, of course: who or what do I relate to as a choreographer, as a teacher, as a practitioner, or as a host? I think the primary perspective I work from is that of a dancer. I develop my work around scores that bring the dancers to relate in particular ways – to themselves, to other dancers, but also to other people who might be watching. So I'm mostly busy

with relations between people: people who relate to themselves and to each other as individuals and as groups – although the practice blurs this distinction and opens a space where it's not quite the one or the other. Dance is the joker in the whole setup. It is placed as the situation we're in already, and from which we start working. It is a pre-given – and also the outcome, yet not as a systematic result of our intention, but in a way that keeps its mystery. [And your intention is aimed at ...] ... at paying attention! Recently, I have been using listening more and more as a form of paying attention, but that would have to include the whole person as a perceptive organ – listening with your sensations, and with your thoughts, with your imagination, with your moods, etc. This morning we were practicing the score *Dancing as a Way of Listening*. We were relating to sound pieces by Luc Ferrari and to texts being read out loud. So there is language and sound one relates to, but then there's also the dance of another person and of the group as well as the person who is watching – and, by dancing, you're making listening easier to her. This is the basic score; and the two main tools that I give are illustration and association.

The first variation of the score, *Dancing as Illustrating What You Hear*, practically means that your dance is the result of neither your plan nor what you would consider a good dance. Rather it's directly indexed to something outside of yourself. You're staying very close to what you hear, but because it's not the same medium, the gap is normally huge – and you will never bridge that. That's why I fear illustration less and less: as long as we don't establish a consistent code of translation, it always fails. And because of this we can keep on reaching and coming closer – and through this approximation we understand how, in this case, the dance is contingent on the text and on the music but also on the dancers. The Association variation is a much more distant version of the score: it practically means that you already need to process a part of the text, maybe just a word, and then produce another imagination that responds to another word – but you're doing that by dancing. You're dancing this associative response.

Once established, these variations, associating and illustrating, can be combined. Very often it's hard to say if you're doing the one or the other. But this is the work we're doing: trying to become finer at understanding how we're relating to that thing that we're listening to. And then to try to produce a form or a surface that could be also a support for somebody

else, in the group and in the audience. Because if you achieve some clarity in what you do and in what the others are doing, you're actually listening together: you're listening through the other people's dances.

Haas How do you relate to these entities? What are the means of relating? And how do you approach them?

Chauchat I relate by dancing and through nonselective attention. I'm trying to gather all the possible channels of perception that we can have of a thing: the sensorial, the material, the affective or emotional, the symbolic, the meanings. But it's also about what you're doing in response to this thing: the dance expressions that emerge out of this relation – can you notice them? This attention to noticing or listening is also a way not to own the things, but simply to be with them. There is this score called *Unison as a Matter of Fact*: imagine a group of people who are all dancing side by side or even together, but not the same movements or sequence. Formally, it's not the same dance. Yet, from this place of noticing the specificity of what you're doing and what the others are doing, you can develop an understanding of all of these doings as one dance. You see that what you relate to is not so important; what's important is *how* you relate. In this case, you start with positing identity, asserting that all the movements are the same – although there is no demonstration of that sameness. And then you need to find the meeting point, while, through this attention, actually starting to synchronize in energetic, formal, dynamic, spatiotemporal ways. So in the end, it is the same dance because we decide it is. The intention modifies our behavior. The dancers then respond to that collective dance and support it, while resisting the simplification of it.

The practice is thus in fact a mixture of technical problems and possibilities that emerge from confronting them, while always looking for the same: a state of absolute commitment, contingency, and autonomy at the same time. And it's a quite tiring practice too, both for the dancers to perform and for the audience to watch. The work is not making itself available. I'm really concerned with stamina: not to exhaust the dancers, not to exhaust the audience, but to keep them at the same time in that space of attention.

Haas What do they do to you? What do they make you do?

Chauchat Yesterday we were practicing the score *Telepathic Dance*. The agreement is simple: the person who's watching

is sending a dance through space to the dancer, who's receiving and dancing it. This is presented rather as a subterranean transfer than a game of instructing or communicating. Yesterday we worked on a version of this score where one person watches and sends while two persons receive and dance. In a one-on-one situation the score can produce a very intense state of intimacy. With two persons receiving and dancing, these dancers have to negotiate all the time with themselves and with each other and try to understand: "Are we both receiving the same dance? Are we receiving complementary elements of the same dance?" Of course, what the receivers dance is a duet in the end, but the score compels a detour around the place where we would conventionally invent a duet together. And it practically means that both sides are authors and spectators of the dance. It's a collaborative production, but one in which you have to make sure that your agency is not overtaking the collective situation.



The score *Telepathic Dance* forms a basis for Alice Chauchat's performance *Togethering, A Group Solo*, 2015

Haas What is in it for them?

Chauchat On Tuesday, there were tons of people in my class at HZT. It's a drop-in class, which means that students from all the programs can come and nobody has to be there every

day. I also asked the dancers who will be in my piece in August to come fifteen times each throughout the two months, so that they can own the practice before we start rehearsing and get to know it as individuals in a changing collective. And there are also other people who simply like the practice or just want to warm up, or who come because they are interested in my work as such. So, you see, it's quite a collection of heterogeneous motivations, skills, and experiences. And that's what is in it for them: it's a site to study dance under particular conditions that they appreciate. But then it also becomes a social space: you develop a common understanding of how to dance together. And you can elaborate different ways of engaging with this. There can be no proof that you're doing it properly – and that's important for the dance to have a life of its own.

Haas To what extent is the relationship based on knowledge?  
Can you describe forms of knowledge?

Chauchat I think that the practice is about knowing without knowing what we know, you know? There's a lot of know-how involved in the practice of relating through dancing – a know-how that the practice requires and that you can only acquire by practicing it. My job is to formulate a clear score. Through that clarity, you know what you have to do. You don't know *how* to do it, but you know where the work lies. But knowledge, in the sense of a transferable knowledge that could be institutionalized? – I think we know nothing when we are dancing! We practice taking part in the world, in collectives, in being together. And this implies these very exciting moments when what you don't know becomes very tangible – not just as a presence but also as a limitation. When I set up a score, I set up a problem – and the limitation is the activating part of the problem. The score needs to make the limits tangible, so that the dancers can actually work with it.

Haas Can a relation fail, and if so, how?

Chauchat Failure is always there, determined by the expectation. My first thought was that sometimes there is no relation. Then, the relation fails, strictly speaking. But I think that relation as such is inescapable anyway: there is no nonrelation. Although you can indeed fail at a particular quality of relation, for example, when there is no noticing in relating – that's a failure. Because noticing is where responsibility comes into play. So the problem of failure seems to be ethical in the end.

When we were working with the *Telepathic Dance* yesterday, we started in a one-on-one setup. I always propose that whenever you notice yourself doing something that you can recognize and that is not in what I call *telepathy* – it could be planning, having projections of how the dance could develop, opinions about good dance, etc. – you stop and start again. I was dancing with Sharon and I had to start over and over again. So, there I would say: “Yeah, I was the one who failed there.” But then she told me: “Well, but you know what happened? I was trying to watch you, but I was distracted by the room full of people all the time.” Ultimately, that wasn’t failure, because what matters is that we kept on trying – and it did lead to something interesting: it changed the syntax and the rhythm of the dance.

Haas How does the relation evolve or transform over time?

Chauchat Very little, I think. Of course, it evolves, but maybe there is no great progress. I’m more concerned with sustainability and stamina than with development and transformation. It’s changing all the time, but it doesn’t matter in which way: it’s still a dance! What matters to me is constant: this peculiar, sometimes tiring form of attention and engagement, where your body, your whole person is at work, and where doing and listening are completely interdependent, if not the same thing. Frankly, I even time the scores, I decide in advance for how long we will do it: is it half an hour or is it three and a half minutes. It’s a bit arbitrary, of course, but it’s not that the dance looks like it’s now closing at any point – and I don’t want it to close! It’s a continuous process.

Alice Chauchat, *Ensembling*, Uferstudios Berlin, 2019



Haas Do you experience the process of relating as an appropriation or a mediation of the other?

Chauchat I think that's a great question. In some scores, there's an attempt to appropriate the other and to confront the impossibility of that task: because you're just not the other. So this is just a permanent reminder of your limitations. Then in the telepathy, you want to mediate the other, but you can never be sure. You also might be projecting all the time, and you're trapped in that space of doubt. And doubt is a very active and activating thing. In *Unison as a Matter of Fact* you're mediating, but you cannot frontally think, "Okay. Now I'm going to mediate the dances of all the others," because if you do, you're going to simplify them. Instead, you grow your tentacles by making your dance more complex. You're adding facets to your dance so that it can resonate with different things that are not the same in a sense. And most importantly, you produce contact surfaces. What happens as a result of that is this subterranean synchronization, which might arrive with the most obvious parameters such as timing, phrasing, and space organization. It is important that you're not aiming for this synchronization immediately, because then you're going to shortcut to habits, to conventional forms. And you need to bypass language in order to activate the capacity of tuning and resonance.

So why is it both, appropriation and mediation, at the same time? It's because you have to understand the subject – or the self, the person – as a porous thing. If you mediate, something is circulating through you, from you and to you. And if you're appropriating, you try to bring something that is outside of you inside you – and to keep it there. But the condition for that – and I'm sure Jared and Angela also spoke to you about that – is this porosity. The thing I relate to can be in me but also independent of me. But there is no entity that relates anyhow – there are only relations that produce entities.

Haas How is power and authority distributed in these relations? Does violence play a part?

Chauchat No. After five years of working with it, it really seems like there is no space for conflict in the practice. I understand why it would be desirable, but there is none. Since the subject dissolves so much in this practice, there is no one left to fight, in a way. Undoing the conflictual way of being in the world might even be a strategy or decision or desire of the

practice. For a while, I've been thinking a lot about privilege and the place where these kinds of practices develop because they are so much about undoing: undoing the subject, undoing authority, undoing judgements, etc. – you can only do that from a sheltered place. But then again, we need to know the relationships we're involved in, in order to gain agency and to actually change them. The first step to do that is to notice and acknowledge: "Yes, we are entangled." And here we find responsibility as a capacity to respond, because you are an active agent in this much larger composition of relationships – you *are* one of them. There is no ethical masterplan behind the practice, but there is activation. But this is just paraphrasing the usual suspects [... *like Donna Haraway?*] Like Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. [*Should we end it here?*] Yes, if you want.

**Jared Gradinger and Angela Schubot**  
**How to relate in contemporary dance?**

Jared Gradinger and Angela Schubot have been creating dance performances together since 2009. Their recent series focusses on the mode of existence of plants and the movement propositions these life forms make. The series consists of *Yew* (2018), *Yew outside* (2018) and *The Nature of Us* (2019). While all of these works were produced in confrontation with the same set of plants and by the same theater, the HAU Hebbel am Ufer in Berlin, they were presented under significantly different circumstances. *Yew*, a duo performed by Gradinger and Schubot themselves, was set in the black box of HAU3. The stage was equipped with a garden of loudspeakers connected to plants using sensor technologies. The audience sat on the floor watching the flora-responsive dance of Gradinger and Schubot and participated in ritualistic acts of relating to the plants, e.g., by drinking or smoking them. As the title indicates, *Yew outside* then brought this piece into the open, namely to the botanical garden Blankenfelde-Pankow in northern Berlin. The audience followed the performers, circling the park area through the twilight from early evening into the night. *The Nature of Us* then reinvented this garden within the infrastructure of a theater stage, the HAU2. The group piece, performed by Andreea David, Roberto Martínez, Andrius Mulokas, Liz Rosenfeld, and Anouk Thériault as well as Gradinger and Schubot, disclosed the techno-ecological conditions of the theatrical milieu and the relate-abilities of the human body as a metabolic organism of and in nature.

The conversation took place on a warm afternoon in June 2019 in the Weinbergspark in Berlin-Mitte. As the artists' dance making and thinking evolves symbiotically, the following answers are not specified to them individually, but ascribed to Gradinger/Schubot as one artistic organism in two parts.

Haas Who or what do you relate to in your choreographic work?

Gradinger/Schubot We made the series in a very similar way to how I made the garden *The Impossible Forest* in Uferstudios Berlin: in co-creation with Nature intelligences. This starts by working with an energetic vortex, calling in the beings or the consciousnesses that are part of the work we intend to make – and then asking and listening. So, who are these entities? First, the consciousness of the piece itself – even at the beginning, when it is still unformed. And Nature or Pan. [Pan?] Well, we don't know Pan so well, but it is what allows the communication to be clear. It creates what's between us, almost like a telephone line: it makes the connection. Then, the plants we were working with: Yew, of course, but also Clover, Moss, Oak, Beech, Fern, Echeveria, and Stinging Nettle. And the Angela-Jared consciousness, as we later had to recognize, when there was this group of other human performers we had to deal with. The botanical garden Blankenfelde-Pankow was definitely an entity that we were working with as well as the theater stages of HAU3 and HAU2. In the rehearsal process you really get intimate with the spaces, acknowledging that they are real collaborators, or homes, and they take a lot of energies through them. But there are also the natural elements or, in the alchemistic terminology of Paracelsus, the Sylphs (air), Gnomes (earth), Salamanders (fire), and Undines (water), which are also in our bodies with the bones, the minerals, the blood, the lungs, the sex, etc. You can meet a plant through what you share with it: these forces at play. There might be a certain flow or rhythm you can synchronize with, because this plant shares the same kind of alchemy.

Haas How do you relate to these entities? What are the means of relating? How do you approach them?

Gradinger/Schubot We approach them very naively. Especially with nonhuman entities or natural forces it's a lot of listening. You basically sit with them and meditate in order to strengthen your intuition for information that is not produced by your own mind. You have to enter into a very slow rhythm, because for most of those entities time is differently configurated than for us, and you have to enter into the materiality of your body in order to be infused by what is in front of you: the plants. In the form of how they infuse you, you

can begin to differentiate. Even *where* they meet you is already part of the information.

There are many layers of listening, not necessarily connected to the ears. For example, you can sit and listen to the floor through your bones. You open up to the other through the whole body, so that your own fulness gets re-inscribed by the other fulness. To achieve this, you need to come to your volume as a sensuous body, not as an object-body controlled by your mind. You need to empty your mind like a screen and then you can see what shows up on the screen. However, once the connection is established, you can work with intention. You can ask things and really be clear – it's not just a vegetable listening! But, initially, softening, quieting the mind – that's the work. Whereas the plants – they really meet you where you are, they join you in your thoughts. The distinction between what's mine and what's not mine gets blurry.



Angela Schubot & Jared Gradinger, *Yew*, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin (HAU3), 2018

Haas What do they make you do?

Gradinger/Schubot The process started with a naïve and almost impossible desire or question: can we be moved by them? We dreamed of being taken over by these plant bodies. And then you try to meet such a body and you can move from this meeting, even from the trying. Or you just allow yourself to be seen by them. But there were also very concrete things: we tried to move as if we had no brain and muscles; or as if we had no front but a 360° focus; or as if there were no translation from being to acting, no distinction between giving and taking, perceiving and growing, but only circulation. When we tried to relate to blossoming and decay as entities, and to both at once, the internal time changed completely. First, you meet the plants in the visual, then you enter into a loop of reciprocity with these beings and they start to form clearer pictures, in the inside as well as in the outside.

Haas What do they do to you? What is in it for them?

Gradinger/Schubot They use you. The plant or specific plants create consciousness about them or excitement around them, they spread through you. Take ayahuasca, for example. It comes from a specific region in the Americas, but in the last ten or fifteen years it has made its way around the globe. This plant travels through everybody it touches and meets. It works through you on many levels. Yet the spreading is also quite abusive to the plant. It is clearly rooted in deeply problematic structures of commodity trading. It extracts the plant from its cosmology and exploits it for profit. Yet you could say that ayahuasca is working with these things, working with capitalism and with humans to its advantage, to spread and proliferate.

Haas How does the particular environment or situation influence the relation?

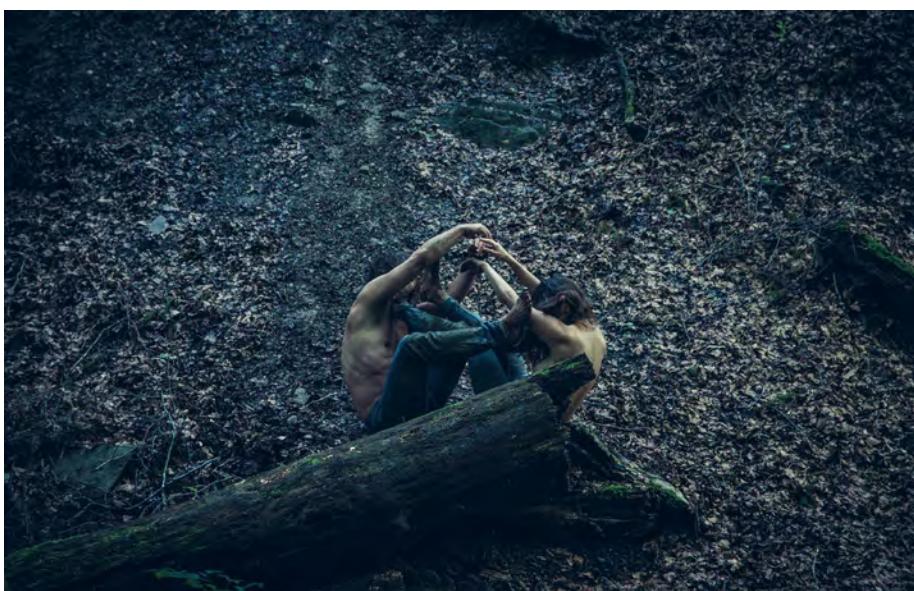
Gradinger/Schubot Working on *Yew*, we were very clear from the beginning to create a piece for the theater in co-creation with nature, yet without presenting nature by putting a lot of plants in the room, but by acknowledging that the room is nature itself, that the entities are energies that we invite into the room, creating a garden with those energies – and then to complete this garden with the other humans that then joined us, the audience. We didn't know what it would be like until the premiere. And every night the entire work was contingent on the people, on how they behaved. The people were really

like weather: sometimes like a big storm blowing through the show and sometimes just like stuck stones [*laughs*] – a landscape that was unique for each show.

When we brought the piece to the botanical garden it was entirely different: for one thing, when you're outside, you're a little more with yourself. But then again, you're with *everything else*. Now your face is not on the dancefloor anymore, but you're with your nose in the soil, metal scraping your face, and a hand crawling across while the sun is setting and the wind is blowing and the birds are there. The intention was to be a part of an environment, an ecology or ecosystem, and to not be the star of the show: you can't compete with the sunset – you don't even want to – or even with the wind blowing through a tree. So suddenly, you're in a relation to this, allowing, accepting, inviting it with this audience. We could do this by ourselves, of course – and we did initially, in the rehearsals – but this other moment eventually comes when it is completed by the *other* other entity, the audience and its consciousness. And what that environment does to them is almost more important than what it does to us.

In the theater, by convention, you have more focus on the performer body. And you are held responsible for the dramaturgy of the piece: how long things take, etc. Outside, this is different: the human way of being is not looked at in the same way. And you're less responsible for time: it would be so arrogant to try to be the master of time there.

Angela Schubot & Jared Gradinger, *Yew outside*, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin  
(botanical garden Blankenfelde-Pankow), 2018



Haas To what extent is the relationship based on knowledge?  
Can you describe the forms of knowledge?

Gradinger / Schubot The knowledge that is required or produced by the encounter is neither stable nor is it *about* the plants. Rather, you have to know how to connect to the plant that actually knows. This approach is indebted to the practices of shamans and healers. It's such a different way of knowledge production than the rather "masculine" way of producing knowledge by extracting it from natural processes and storing it as if it weren't changing. You cannot put it to test and prove that it will always work, because it has to emerge out of a vital connection. A lot of the information you get is just the resonance of that specific encounter. It's so tied to the moment – and yet it's bigger than any moment: it's the whole cosmos. You have to accept that this knowledge changes when you put it in words. It is just made to dissolve the immobility of this moment. And it's very idiosyncratic – while your subjectivity is actually tied to it.

Haas Can the relation fail? And if so, how?

Gradinger / Schubot The relation can fail if you're not open, if you're in your mind – then it's very difficult to connect. If the relation is one-sided, if there is no reciprocity – I'm changing it, but I'm not changed by it – it becomes abusive. Yet I'd say that failing is in fact part of the encounter, teaching you where you are at the moment – although I think the plants don't operate in those terms. The failure on our side depends on the intention. As an artist or a maker, I cannot work with something that doesn't reach my consciousness. Then, of course, I can still say that unconsciously something big is happening that might come out in other ways, but I prefer when things arise to my consciousness and I can work with them as a potential counterpart.

Haas Do you experience the process of relating as an appropriation or mediation of the other?

Gradinger / Schubot It's an encounter! But it would be naïve to think that it's not an appropriation or mediation at the same time. It depends on the historical moment and your definition of the concepts. You might understand appropriation today in regards to the commodity form in capitalism, as an abuse that creates value. The encounter with the plants, however, feels more like channeling, a reciprocity loop rushing through you. This is a very pure form of mediation, where you

basically become the vessel for something else. This is not necessarily better though: appropriation is at play here, too, since we create a piece out of this encounter and show it to people, sell it on the market. However, any real encounter has a segment of mediation and a segment appropriation – and a space in between!

If I want to meet this tree, for example [pointing at a tree]. Would it be considered appropriation if I take my form to become that tree in a mimetic act? By assuming the form of the other, in my best, most earnest way I dedicate myself to the other; form meets form, a door is opened and things are able to flow after that. While at the same time, in regards to plants, politically everything appears to be appropriation today: in twenty years the abuse of nature in capitalism will be limitless. I honestly don't know how to respond to this. There's so much trauma in this and everything is infused with it. I could never say I could do anything that's not part of this appropriation, but you can still highlight the things that are knotted and work with a "good intention," I think – for lack of a better word.



Angela Schubot & Jared Gradinger, *The Nature of Us*, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin (HAU2), 2019

Haas How are power and authority distributed in these relations? Does violence play a part here?

Gradinger / Schubot Violence used to play more of a part ten years ago when we started to work together. We both enjoyed feeling each other through hard impact. We liked this fleshiness of being in the world. We liked to sweat and to move and to push and be taken, to be able to surrender and to agree in the violence. We both were kind of impact junkies, if you will. This has changed now: there is less being-into each other, but more co-existing next to each other. In what ways can we exist together without having to become one? It also has to do with age and injuries – that's a reality.

But to come back to the recent series, there's also a lot of violence in plants. How do you experience a tree that was hit by a lightning, torn apart, but that creates a home for millions of creatures? When we met this violence in meditations, there was always so much wisdom inside it and so little judgment. We pushed the violent aspect further in the group piece in order not to become passive bodies, but bodies with desire and intention and force – forces – in order to live this violence as one of the many beautiful ways in which one can be in this world.

At the same time, plants have a lot of authority! To trust and serve other authorities than the mind was challenging but extremely important for the process. You've got to believe in something outside of yourself and your decisive artistic brain, which is in fact mostly concerned with the question of who takes space and who gets the right to express, to get heard, to manifest and to create. But the idea that, if you take space, you take it away from others is again a very capitalist logic. The plants tell a totally different story: there are so many other ways to relate beyond "more or less," allowing for asymmetries. As we two have learned from the plants: it's ok that the proportion is not always 50/50!

Jeremy Wade,  
How to relate in contemporary dance?

Jeremy Wade's latest piece that premiered in Berlin, *The Clearing* (Hebbel am Ufer, HAU2, 2019), continued the artist's interest in the abilities of the dancing body to relate to the im/material forces that condition human existence in the dystopia of today's turbocapitalism. Through the almost shamanistic mediation of the physical, affective, nervous, sentient body of himself and of others, his performances imagine queer futures in which care might

compete with exploitation as the defining mode of relating. Wade shares the stage with the musician Marc Lohr, who creates a mostly electronic score to the dancer's actions. *The Clearing* is divided in three parts. The first one is strictly movement-based; the dancer, tuning the space with maintenance equipment, leads into the alter-reality of a speculative deep future through dense and intense, jerky movement. The second part is centered around a light object, which might be read as a symbol of time, to which the performer gives birth and that eventually dies. After a break, the audience gathers back in the theater now hosting a dark cabaret show, musically accompanied by Lohr on the piano and by Wade's temporary alter ego Puddles the Pelican, who, as an entertainer on a cruise ship, desperately tries to keep the mood up in the midst of a catastrophic scenario.

The conversation about this work and its larger artistic context took place on a Sunday in June 2019 in Wade's Neukölln apartment and a nearby breakfast café.

**Haas** Who or what do you relate to in your choreographic practice?

**Wade** In *The Clearing* we're trying to problematize the idea of repair, evoking different technologies of impossible repair. We map out the character of a caretaker in a future, nomadic, precarious gig-economy. We situate this character between a labor-class facilities manager and a cleaner of temples, creator of rituals – both are hosts and facilitators of maintenance and repair. But this figure is also a mediator, in a way, aligning forces and using this impossible, yet effective energetic form of repair to create a particular clearing: to clear the space, to rid the space, to synchronize the space, to attune, to align the space in order for future clearings to occur, in order for something else to occur. We relate through costume, through this very minimal set, through this haunting, driving, crystalline wall of sound that Marc creates and invoke a very dense, coded space of phallic ghosts, of shitty patriarchal stories and monumental, massive, mountainous narratives that haunt us. How is it possible that this impossible caretaker, that this hallucinogenic facilities manager might clear out the wreckage of the past in order to come to new clearings?

Miss Caretaker wears a blue see-through latex suit. She holds this tiny pink tassel and is tuning the space with this very fragile, very flamboyant, very feminine decorative thing. She's pushing a futuristic janitor's cart that is upholstered with mirrors and vinyl. Thinking of the materials alone – the laser, rubber, the latex crinoline – the aesthetics references a particular LGBTQ political history, brought to a shamanistic

ritual. How do we use speculative fiction? How do we use new forms of relationality? How do we use this hallucination on stage in order to create this psychic charge of possibility, this impossible, yet effective charge where new connections, new relations, new systems may be coming into being – if just temporarily?

For me, moving towards repair was a continuation of the question of care – also in terms of the planet, in terms of the Anthropocene. I guess I'm constantly trying to problematize hope and I'm constantly trying to reconcile with the things that we've lost in the fire, so to speak – and then: how do we continue after the fire?



Jeremy Wade, *The Clearing*, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin (HAU2), 2019

Haas How do you relate to these entities? What are the means of relating? How do you approach them?

Wade There is this somatic score that I like to use to reach a certain physicality: the space is thick. We're surrounded by billions and billions of molecules. Actually, we're swimming in this space. The eighty billion cells of our body are facing in every direction at once. The space is thick and I am negotiating this thickness: the eyes begin to roll, there's a particular kind of ecstatic, emotional, fluid state. Maybe this state then becomes too much and the body begins to unwork in

this drunkenness, in this hyperfluidity. At a certain point the space becomes even thicker and the muscularity, the tension, the whole body begins to pulse in this labor of negotiating the thickness of the space. And through the muck, through the swamp, through this very dark particular score one pulls oneself through – and eventually lands on the clearing, so to speak. The body transitions to get into another state, a kind of hollow-bone immateriality, a light, pixelated continuum-space.

Through this score I try to create practices that might serve as an interface to other ways of relating to space. How do we negotiate the possible and the impossible, creating fantasies for the body? The body is shifting through this continuum of fantasies, the emotional, behavioral, historical, political reality of the vulnerable body and its relationship to the untenable, navigating the space of where the body ends and where the body begins. We have these tricks as performers, as choreographers, as people who weave an imagination through the corporal. The stage is this playground of materiality, of relationality, this virtual platform to play out this complex past-present-future of the body. Through this question of where the body ends and begins the performer on stage – with light, with sound, with costume, with the connection between voice and movement, with the animation of breath – can enact a hyperproximity, can bring you to the most delicate, intimate fragile now. The manifold tools also include just sitting at a writer's table and really trying to contemplate the world that we want to be in. For *The Clearing* we were looking through the lens of disability studies, queer theory, postcolonial studies, and especially into the question of reparations.

But *The Clearing* also has a sense of humor. It could be too serious – and it is! But there is something about this little silly pink tassel, and the fact that I'm doing this complex dance with potato mashers. The history of LGBTQ social dancing resonates here, of course, which maybe borders spiritual attunement. I thought a lot about the silk scarf dances that happened in the eighties and nineties in LGBT clubs. You might go to the Paradise Garage or to Sound Factory in New York City, and you take a hit of ecstasy or you'd have a bottle of poppers, and you'd have your silk scarf, and the music would be playing and so on – what kind of attunement is this? What kind of clearing does this enact? What does the choreography of a nightclub create, the behavior of the go-go dancer or the bartender, the interactions, the darkroom – and that queen

who's doing that flag dance on the dance floor? What kind of world does this bring into being?

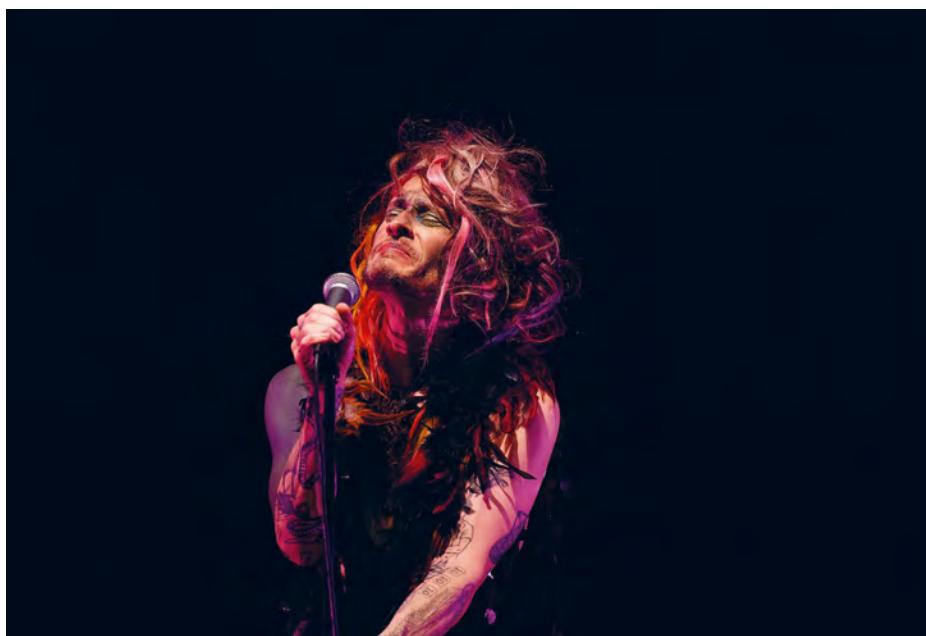
One of my favorite go-to stories in regards to this and the power of humorous social protest is the demonstrators in New York City in the first wave of the AIDS crisis in the eighties: the police is coming out of an armored van, and they're wearing these neon-orange rubber boots and rubber gloves and it looks they're fitted out for Chernobyl – and the faggots on the ground scream: "Your gloves don't match your shoes! Your gloves don't match your shoes." These activist trickster tactics are essentially about having a laugh, before you're going to get your shit kicked out of you, knitting worlds together through humor, sarcasm, beauty, and fakery. I'm haunted by people whose work had another kind of social, political charge to it. I relate to having a laugh as the ship is sinking and the solidarity that can be created through this kind of humor as a form of social protest, as a cohesive bond.

**Haas** What do they do to you? What do they make you do?

**Wade** I was an only child and I grew up in a remote area in the woods, where I spent a lot of time alone, working with onomatopoeic explosions, improvised phrases – which is a very physical practice. I wasn't one of these people who had an imaginary friend, but I had my games that worked quite systematically as well as places that had a particular architecture that I would go to for particular clearings. At a very young age of around ten I started charting out my fantasies. They were incredibly real for me, since body imagination came very easy for me, dealing with things that weren't there. I created scores to escape my own self, ghosting trails where my body ends and where it begins – dealing with heat signatures, energetic reconciliations of the body in order to really tune into the sensation, to work with other forms of materiality – it's about hypersensitivity to detail and cultivating a fantasy as a mover in the space. I'm very interested in scores that move a body in the bones because it's too heavy to lift it on my own. I want the imagination to be so precise that it moves me. Thus, in a way, the scores are the ultimate ghosts – the score that frames the fantasy, the matter-narrative. You extrapolate, you chart out a fantasy so rich and so complex and so dark that these ghosts become actually incredibly clear: the past that haunts us, the phallic stories, these phobic narratives about what it means to be to be a thing in this world.

Haas How does the spectator or audience influence the relation?

Wade I use these ghosts of my past as a way of reconciling with the incomprehensible present. Emotional, behavioral, social interactions that were really uncomfortable, for instance. There is this example of me as a kid when my dad asked me to play baseball although I didn't like baseball. I would cringe at the ball coming at me. I was scared. Eventually, I would cringe at my father cringing at me. For me these avoidance mechanisms form the physical reality of social norms of exclusion, of power, and hetero narratives, of dominant kinds of masculine modes of being. On stage this might translate through the stumble, the spasm, the cringe. This is a kind of ghosting, too, so deeply ingrained in the awareness of the gesture and the negative space around that gesture. I relate to moving towards the strange with the body, to fumbling on the inside of my legs and to the positionality of the spine and those very delicate and sensitive moments where the solar plexus kind of moves up in the Adam's apple and the body crunches and collapses in this. In this powerful uncomfortability I relate to the fragility of the body as a particular mode of being – and not just mine: it happens between bodies.



Jeremy Wade, *The Clearing*, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin (HAU2), 2019

Haas Can the relation fail? And if so, how?

Wade The third and last act of *The Clearing* is set on a cruise ship starring Puddles the Pelican, a cabaret singer and the activities director of the ship. This ship is literally taking you through the underworld. It is mapped out in the deep future where there is no land, there is no horizon. Toxic grey clouds meet the water. The tops of skyscrapers are peeked from the deep like crooked reaching fingers of the elderly, sharp as knives, pale and stiff. We are on this super apocalyptic terrain and at the same time the activities director is like: "We have maggots for sale. The rooms don't have balconies but they come with a king size bed. Oh! And our evening's entertainment is about to begin!" As the fiction goes, Puddles is not only this entertainer but also a pelican covered in oil from the Deep Horizon oil spill. She was rescued by the ship she's now performing on. She's a trashy washed up drunk of a pelican who's trying to reconcile with the loss of her sister, who didn't survive the oil, and the loss of her home.

So, I was trying to imagine that I was covered in blood, that I was in deep mourning for someone that had died, and that I would simultaneously be the host of people on this cruise ship. This messy, broken queen performs a hyperbolic, total-failure cabaret. And in many ways Puddles weaves a world together through humor and through this kind of grotesque irreverence: she's falling, she's stumbling, she's not making sense, she's losing her words. She lives it up through this agility, this vulnerability – and for me this is a torch song that helps to reconcile with the complicated now.

Performing this absolute surrender could be toxic if it's not done in the right way. Sometimes, as a performer, you can't let go of your framework. Sometimes you're just too good at failing. This piece is taking a risk of inviting the audience into a very difficult space. And power is also really entwined in the space, since I'm commanding it on my own. But hopefully, it's also charged with failure. Hopefully, it's so charged with impossibility. Hopefully, it's so charged with a sense of humor and sensitivity. It's undoubtedly a ritual space that you're invited into. But then again, I don't want to be Jesus, and there is nothing wrong with you. I can't heal you but I'll do the very best that I can. So the humor creates this permission to really take it seriously or not – to be in and out.

As to the larger question of what I relate to in my work: I really relate to being a host, who keeps a very particular threshold

and invites you to cross over that threshold all the way. I'm very familiar with that role in my work. I do it all the time.

Haas How does the particular environment or situation influence the relation?

Wade In *The Clearing*, everything is a lot: a lot of costumes, of objects, a lot of lights, of sound. It's definitely this cornucopia, a maximalist approach. I remember all the conversations I had around how to bring Puddles into being with stage and costume designer Claudia Hill. How do we generate this myth around the pelican who's covered in oil in the bottom of a cruise ship at the end of the world? That already is a very complex score to fill. So Claudia eventually made a wig of all these different pieces of hair that she had found and stitched together. And she literally designed a trash bag cape. We decided that we don't want to use new materials but as many recycled materials as possible – you can do a lot with trash! Trash is complex!

## Kathrin Thiele

### Figuration and/as Critique in Relational Matters<sup>1</sup>

Figuration as a speculative relational technique for a different vision on and for the world is one of the most promising feminist in(ter)ventions toward an onto-epistemological methodology for feminist research and practice. And its genealogy, by which it has become one of the central (material) metaphors for a world-practicing-thinking-differently, is for me deeply connected to two feminist thinkers in particular: Donna Haraway (feminist technoscience) and Rosi Braidotti (feminist philosophy). Since the 1980s, both scholars have used and elaborated upon the concept of figuration throughout their work, and they have also influenced each other in these ongoing propositions of how figuration matters, both for critical thought and concrete living. In my current research project on "Relation(al) Matters," in which I engage closely with conceptual issues of complex relationality as a primary condition(ing) of planetary existence, I use the following genealogy in relation to the conceptualization of figuration in Braidotti's and Haraway's work: introduced by Haraway in her "Cyborg Manifesto" in 1985, the cyborg can be read as one of the earliest speculative figures that Haraway *thinks-with*, being joined then by

1 A different version of this text has been translated into German for Angerer, Marie-Luise and Gramlich, Naomie (eds.), *Feministisches Spekulieren: Genealogien, Narrationen, Zeitlichkeiten*, Berlin 2020.