

TRAVELLING, FLEEING, PASSING (THE ARTIST AS "TRANSIENT")

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Derived from the Latin word 'transire' (meaning to pass by), "transient" means fleeting, impermanent, short-lived. It also has technical meanings, such as unstable or fluctuating. It can also be used to describe a homeless person or a traveller. A word, then, well suited to adequately describe the contemporary, residence-based choreographer.

Being an artist means being out of place in the world. If I wish to approach the world with an artistic statement and thus take part in it, I still need to distance myself a bit from it. In order, for instance, to move bodies to dance and to involve the body choreographically, I need to distance myself from the body in its daily functions. It's only through this distance that I will be able to abstract movements from it and then choreograph them. The same goes for writing as regards everyday speech or for painting as regards symbols. I think that this necessary distanciation from the world in order to take part in it is one of the reasons why artists always work in places other than their homes.

This circumstance might have contributed to the fact that choreographers travel more and more around the world in order to create or do research in so-called residencies. Producers from around the world offer living and work spaces and sometimes financial backing too, for choreographers to be able to work there. The latter travel from one place to the next, follow their work and thus become travellers who not only distance themselves from the world in order to create, but turn travelling into a condition, in order to keep their heads above water financially. In a sense, they do make it abroad, but hardly really into the world.

When I was a teenager, at home, travelling was considered as a school of life. Whoever had travelled had gathered experiences which he never could have made at home: using foreign languages as well as hands and feet to talk to people and get directions, learning foreign customs and usages, trying out unusual dishes, deciphering timetables, putting up and taking down tents, experiencing love, discovering cultures. I too travelled with friends into the big wide world, and returned home full of impressions and rejoiced at the idea of being able to use my experiences at some later date – in life, in other words. The advantage in those days: there was such a thing as a home, which was sometimes annoying, but where one could return

to and from where one could depart into life. I could never have imagined that I would once choose a job in which travelling would serve to earn a living. Today I can hardly imagine living, or rather, surviving, without travelling. I am a choreographer.

And I'm writing these lines in a train from Berlin to Essen, where from tomorrow I'll be working in residence at PACT Zollverein. I'm seated in a coach flying on the tracks at around 180kph. Outside the evening lights are flashing past. Like a space traveller I'm speeding in my spaceship on my way there, where I'll get in just after midnight and where I'll be spending the next four weeks. This year and last year I made two projects: one, *mnemonic nonstop*, thematized being-elsewhere, and the other, *Incidental Journey*, was based on the differences between places. The first was a project which I had conceived together with Jochen Roller, and the second was commissioned by APAP (Advancing Performing Arts Projects). In total, in the last 18 months, I visited for these two projects alone nine places for a period of two to three weeks: Leuven, Tel Aviv, Zagreb, Torres Vedras, Kortrijk, Salzburg, Bytom and Castiglioncello. In each of these places I obtained what is generally described in the contemporary dance scene as a residence. The local producers provided living and work spaces, sometimes also money, and in return I worked on pieces.

At bottom, the idea of the residence isn't such a bad one, that is as a temporary stay in a foreign place where one can work creatively, undisturbed by domestic temptations and worries. When Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte offered Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio a residency in his home at the Palazzo Madama in 1595, this was a gesture which was indeed triggered by the own interests of a church involved in a counter-reformation, but it was also a hospitable gesture. The artist is free to pursue his work without any worries since cared for in the hospitable house. For which purpose he is given space, time, money, food and materials. In exchange, the artist paints some graphic and vivid pictures depicting biblical stories. An exchange in which the artist, whose paintings were bought, could in fact only win.

Residencies today are also marked by this mix of hospitality and exchange: an arthouse or a dance producer will offer a choreographer and his team both living and work spaces, and in certain circumstances also travel expenses, daily allowances and sometimes also a financial contribution to the production. In a sense, then, residencies function as both a welcoming of artists in the house and a hospitable gesture towards strangers. This hospitality is often linked to the fact that a piece will be worked on and shown at the house in question. There's almost always at the end of a residency a showing or some kind of public moment. In any case, the

artist can't lose. The difference with Francesco Maria del Monte and Caravaggio, however, is the degree of institutionalisation: whereas Caravaggio was a guest at someone's home, contemporary artists are so in institutions. No matter how much trouble the co-workers of such an institution give themselves, guest lodgings remain guest lodgings and, what with their Ikea furniture, have only so much charm and can offer only rather limited cooking facilities with their Spartan kitchens. But this isn't necessarily a bad thing, since the main aspect, i.e. uninterrupted work, is in fact always guaranteed. Whether a (lengthy) stay overseas is necessary for this purpose, however, is another question.

The fact is that many production structures and networks in contemporary dance almost always function via residencies. There are often too few means available in a city or a region to support the number of choreographers living and working there. Instead, networks are developed and encouraged, promoting exchanges between cities, regions and countries. Choreographers of one country are sent abroad and choreographers from overseas are invited home. Important streams then develop (or rather, in view of the relatively limited number of choreographers and dancers in the world, rivulets): streams of people doing research here, producing there, developing new forms somewhere else and opening yet again elsewhere; streams of money too, managed in one place, paid to artists in residence in another, and spent by them somewhere else; and finally, streams of contacts too, which, because of the near constant travelling, become almost always fleeting and somehow blunted.

This situation can't be described as a migration, since that commonly entails a generally poor starting point and a generally rich destination in an economically motivated movement from A to B. In the past one could still call every form of permanent travel nomadic (even if I'm not quite sure whether nomadism doesn't in fact always occur on the edges of empires, whereas what's described here is actually taking place at the heart of the empire, namely in a capitalist system resting primarily on money transfers). The nomadism of residences attempts namely to enter these money flows, to create something from them and tap into them. There are hardly any travel destinations, at most only travel and flight routes, on which the artists of the world escape, flee towards their art and brush against those colleagues with whom they sometimes share friendships or develop complicities. This near compulsory system of residencies often leads to an economical necessity for the choreographer to be elsewhere. In my own case (which, admittedly, also makes up part of the motivation for this text), the case is that for five productions in the last four years I received a total of 13.000euro from the *Senat für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur* in my hometown of Berlin (and nothing from the

Hauptstadtkulturfonds) and so that's why I'm dependent on residencies for my research and productions. Whether this is going to change in the near future is another story. In any case, I'm not alone in this situation.

At the same time, this being-elsewhere can be absolutely exciting. It's hardly evoked in the works created in residence, however, but experienced exclusively on the edge of the work process. For *mnemonic nonstop*, the collaboration I already mentioned with Jochen Roller, we had decided to thematize the process of finding one's way around new surroundings. We wanted to create a piece about the fact of being on the road in, and passing through, foreign cities. For this purpose we adapted the *dérive* technique, which was developed by the Situationists in the 1950s. Thus we wandered through foreign cities, gathering impressions, physical sensations, stories and movements and created out of this a choreography of dances, texts and pictures. Our aim wasn't so much disorientation in a foreign country, but rather the mapping of the unknown. We supposed that choreography can make foreign experiences visible and is as such an art of cartography. The ecstasy of being on the road was secondary, and travelling was rather tiring, but also a pleasure which threw up many funny stories. Our interest lay less in the distance to the world as in getting to know foreign places.

This acquaintance always begins with the arrival, which thus also becomes a kind of territorialisation and a taking-possession-of. First of all, practical questions need to be answered: directions have to be explained, house and studio keys have to be handed over, shopping and washing facilities have to be explained, and occasional recreative places such as swimming pools or museums need to be located. Favourite places and roads are remembered as quickly as possible. In a nutshell: the new place is mapped, turned into a semi-domestic place and, in a sense, incorporated. Certain dishes are linked with certain places – fish with beet and carrots in Zagreb, lettuce with pumpkin seed oil in Graz, pasta with seafoods in Castiglioncello, chips with *sauce andalouse* in Leuven. And sometimes when I return to a place, I still know the way to the dance studio. My body remembers the layout of the streets and the conditions of the roads, without me having to remember where it's taking me.

But let's return to the first arrival. The senses are wide open, the gaze takes in everything, sees the unusual and also the usual in a new light, the spirit is wide awake, the soul is light. The place, the people, the coproducer's colleagues are largely unknown, just as we are unknown to them. And even when not much happens, everything is possible and you want to take hold of and incorporate everything. The first outing, from the studio or the artist's apartment,

generally leads one in the first place to the city centre to do some shopping: a cable one needs, the forgotten post-it's, a couple of DV tapes or less urgent things such as a new pair of shoes, a shirt or new CDs. This is nothing more than a question of occupying and taking possession of the unknown. And nothing is better suited to that purpose than shopping, a practice which is generally tolerated in capitalist societies, and even recommended and unconsciously demanded for things to run their course. It gives one the feeling of taking in a new place and controlling it. And that isn't even an illusion, since in buying an object I actually did take possession of something which, until I bought it, belonged to an inhabitant of the city and thus in a sense to the city itself. Whether this shopping serves art in any way is another question: the small new camera I bought in Essen, yes. But I'm not so sure about the checkered pants from Salzburg. And I left the bathroom slippers from Castiglioncello behind; in no way could they have served art.

A more important question, however, is in how far travelling can serve art and what the cities of residence and their inhabitants actually get out of these foreign choreographers. Just as asking about the purpose of art and what does and doesn't serve art is problematic, so too is it no less important to have a closer at this issue in the study of choreographies in residencies. Since it's not only in notes for residences that some side effects are described. Depending on the means of travel and the individual artists's preferences, they're more or less serious matters: the environmental tax on air travel; jet lag; lack of sleep; long distance relations which sometimes end following temporary separations; considerable eating expenses since one generally eats out; distanciation from one's real home; friendships which slowly go under because of the lack of time; acquaintances which, as a means of compensation, are turned into friendships; alcohol and other addictions; rotting leftovers in the fridges of guest lodgings; favourite objects being forgotten in hotel rooms; and more. I've been through some of the above myself, while I've seen some happen to colleagues. Of course it's possible to suppose that some of these problems could also arise without the need to travel. But I would argue that these side effects give weight to the above question on the purpose of residencies. Since once the novelty of travelling and of being-elsewhere has worn off and working abroad has become a habit, then the side effects come to the fore and signs of fatigue appear. Especially when the research isn't bound to the place of residence, there's no reason why one couldn't do the research at home. Except perhaps for the above nature of production structures and networks and perhaps also the advantage of being free of domestic everyday worries for a certain period of time.

Yet there are also projects for which organizers not only offer work residencies, but also require that the work be location bound. Travelling then becomes a factor of productivity, linking the cosmopolitan to the regional. The widely travelled artist brings the experiences which he gathered in different places around the world to the region, brings its specificities in synergy with his experiences and out of this creates art. One such project was the above APAP, to which the Tanzfabrik Berlin had invited me earlier this year. My contribution was a city tour along the invisible traces of accidents and incidents which had taken place in each city and had had lasting repercussions – *Incidental Journey*. For this purpose I interviewed inhabitants of each city, wandered around the streets to locate the stories I'd been told, and gave the locals a new perspective on old matters by means of my outsider's point of view. In its transience and fleetingness, the "choreographic memorial" staged at the end of each tour by means of a map of the tour painted on the ground can also serve here as a symbol for the passing of *Incidental Journey* through six European cities: a trip through the city, but a trip which was itself on the road. Travel was here particularly demanding (getting around each city touched not only everyday matters but also the artistic production), but, in the context of the project, it was an inevitable part of the job and thus it made sense.

If the existing network of residences, whether production or research residences, are to become more meaningful one way or another, it needs to be thought through from the bottom up. First of all there needs to be a totally different infrastructure on location, such as child care for choreographers with families or also better furnished lodgings. Secondly, residencies should also be financed by art houses when the choreographer prefers to work at home (for instance, art houses could exchange work places among themselves; saved travel expenses could be used for the renting of studios; or one could also imagine how much time and money could be saved if travel and adaptation days fell away), i.e. the concept of residency needs to be rethought, bearing in mind the needs of the artists. One could also envisage better cooperation between regional project sponsors and producers, theatres and art houses; ministry and senate juries should understand, for instance, that research and breaks can make as much sense as the sponsoring of projects. And producers, and perhaps choreographers and dancers too, need to think more about how the artists can be brought into closer synergy with the places of residence (withouth, however, creating a new system of location-bound residencies, but always with an eye on the freedom of the dance production).

That all this would cost more money and that, as a result, there would be less money for large productions is beyond question. Still, at a time when the decline of fossil fuels is within sight

and new sources of energy are gaining in importance, i.e. at a time when a new consciousness is emerging about the size and means of capitalist goods and streams of goods, at such a time dance shouldn't shy away from spending its means on other than just the prestige of individual artists or on the fashioning of production and research locations. It could make sense to rethink the size of productions and reduce them in size to make them more friendly. And even if that wouldn't solve the paradox of the artist's turning away from the world in order to take part in it artistically, it might just be that a more pragmatic and transparent handling of foreignness, travel and artistic productivity could shed some light on the myth of the artist as a travelling hermit and perhaps even do away with it in the end. But that's another story...

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