TRANS ART WORKS



Art based research & choreography

Sebastian Prantl & Cecilia Li

www.transartworks.net / www.tanzatelierwien.at / www.bildhauerhaus.at

TAW, Neustiftgasse 38, 1070 Vienna in co-operation with SEB, St. Margarethen, Bgld.

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Trans Art Works supports several conceptual approaches that are inter-connected, yet point in different directions: *transitory art, transcultural art (enterprises), art in transit*. Furthermore, it affirms that *'art can work and help'* through *'performative works of art'* that feature juxtapositions and raise questions, but in the end assume an oscillating standpoint.

As a personal component, the term also describes the geographic-cultural background of the initiating artists: 'Taiwan - Austria Working (Grounds)', on which Cecilia Li and Sebastian Prantl have expanded their oeuvre for more than thirty years. Both artists are distinguished professionals with many years of experience in their specific fields: solo piano / music dramaturgy on the one hand, solo dance / choreography / directing on the other. They both enjoyed being educated in Europe and America, far away from their countries of origin.

Founded in 1988 as the first studio for dance and interdisciplinary arts in Vienna, TAW launched transcultural discourses and productions from the very beginning, emphasizing art historical and philosophical themes. Contributors and co-collaborators have included Friedrich Cerha, Friederike Mayröcker, Michael Pilz, David Lang, Victoria Coeln, Joshito Ohno, Valie Export, Renate Hammer, Gill Clark, Soenke Zehle, Arvo Pärt, Othello Johns, Karlheinz Essl, Johanna Rainer, Sol Le Witt, Othmar Schmiderer, Kristin Lovejoy, Lawrence Casserley, Silvia Grossmann, Johannes Birringer, Ku Ming-Shen, Elisabeth Dalman.



F. Kiesler, W.A. Mozart, J. M. Hauer, S. Freud, P. Mondrian, W.B. Yeats, J. Haydn, W. Shakespeare… are tapped for both themes and content.

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MISSION



International artists with their unique, distinguished oeuvre engage dialogically and open up common ground. Juxtapositions, interfaces and diverse choreographic structures with different temporal frameworks foster an open space, changing it architecturally, expanding it kinetically and tuning it rhythmically. Consequently the enhanced spaces become charged and (e)motionally illuminated.

TAW aims to network contributions and formats from different genres of art and science - emphasizing transcultural ties. Timely themes: migration, dynamics, crisis, kairos, frequency, economy, light, deceleration, memory... provide an exemplary choreographic framework that is studied and staged. TAW pays tribute to spontaneous gesture ('real-time-com-position') and long-term framework conditions ('ensemble-work-processing'), generating exemplary events whose form and content foster a trans-formative effect.

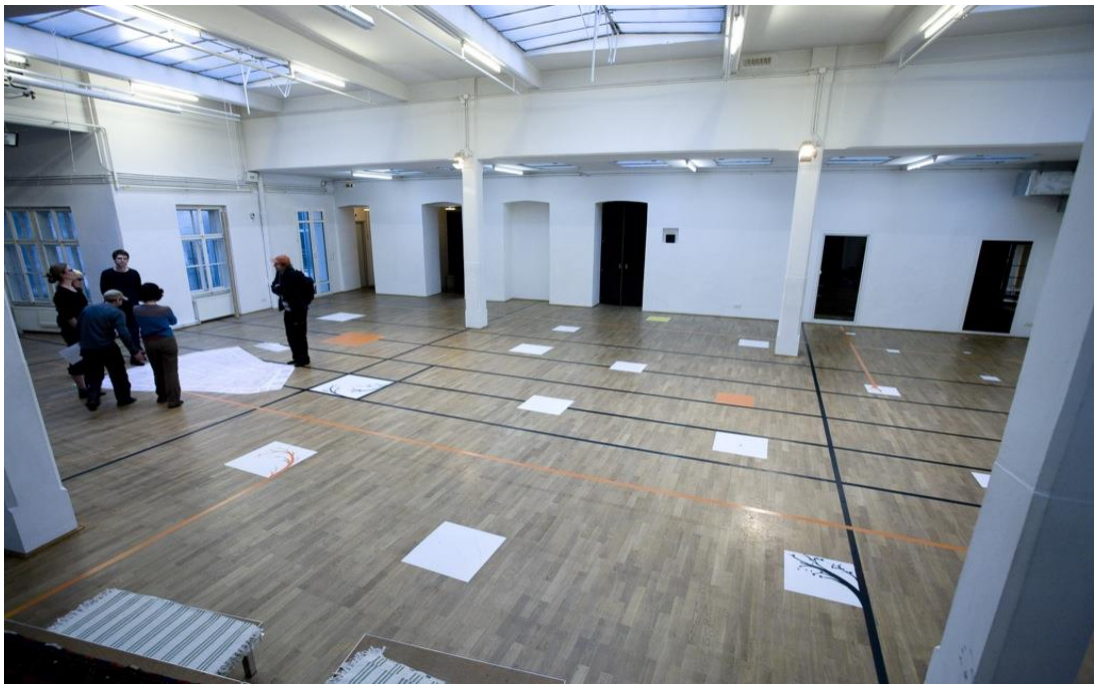
As trans-generational discourses implement and provoke various contact points, a sensitive interplay emerges within ‘new hierarchies’ beyond age and experience. These enterprises require heightened awareness and coordination during their 'evolution' in order to ultimately experience (trans)formation, (trans)ference, abstraction and composition.

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TAW also acts as a think tank (and office) for postgraduate research through the 'International Choreolab Austria' (ICLA) - which explores and presents subject-specific topics in unique spaces, including a stone quarry, a church, a temple, a campus, an opera and a village square. Since 2008 TAW has conducted workshops and performances at art universities in Asia and Europe (Taiwan National University of Arts - NTUA, Taipei National University of the Arts - TNUA and Tainan National University of the Arts - TNNUA, Danube University Krems – DUK and many others).

RESEARCH

Art-based research examines the relationship between sensation and perception within a professional as well as a general framework. Sensation involves the spontaneous, continuous sensation as it enters the body through the senses and oscillates within. To perceive, means to establish a process that connects to sensation, reflecting upon specific attributes that rise to the level of consciousness, which then perceives something as “true” in the aesthetic, ethical and political sense. The attributes – which inform the nature of a perception – exist within several dimensions, some on a personal and others on a social level. As the relationship between sensation and perception has often been seen as a causal one, leading the two to be thought of as a process, the relationship can also be viewed as an open one in which both are of equal value and dialogically connected.



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This expansive view is proscribed here as art-based research. Promoting such elementary research is meaningful, indeed necessary - given the need for energetic, yet sensitive communication to compensate, on the one hand, for the increasing stress and anonymous hyperactivity of the current 'working world', and confronting the erosion of truth-finding and a blatant disregard of history on the other. It acts as an abstract corrective and can provide empowerment and support.

As our 'being' longs for a ‘true sense on reality' – while also remaining captivated by the (digital) future – art-based research can provide visions and correctives in equal measure, thus counterbalancing the post-capitalist struggle and its constant consumerism. In this way art - fostering creation through research - functions within a traditional concept of culture, as well as taking on a 'progressive role' that has nothing to do with growth and exploitation in an economic sense.



The ongoing debate about the changing nature of work versus progress is a pointless distraction in the face of automation and rapid technological advancement - where the creation of meaningful content and its careful employment in the working economy are relevant for survival. To take a new look at art (creation) does not mean being out of touch with the real world. For example, given the educational debate that currently talks about educating from what, to what level, and for what purpose (Pisa studies, etc.), as well as education through 'life-long-learning' programs on the world-wide-web, there is in fact a wide-spread discussion that requires further delineation.

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CONTEXT

As the 21st century unfolds, art serves as a catalyst for diverse needs amid the transition from an oft described ‘post-modernism’ to an 'age of anger' (Pankai Mishra) that supersedes the traditional discourse of 'western’ analysis. In the wake of the global (economic) progress, fueled by China's miraculous advancement on all fronts, uncertainty and anger in the West continues to grow, not least due to 'Trumpism'. Anger has pre-conditions and is associated with fear, raising the question: fear of what? The fear of the 'other'? Is our greatest uncertainty about how we will meet our future? Whether our 'progress' is even sustainable and lasting? Or does it have to do with emptiness and exhaustion, or with hollowness in general? In the epoch-making interplay of progress and stagnation, there exists the manifold hollowness of always striving to overcome, which the ancient Greeks dubbed with the concept of 'Crisis' and 'Kairos'. Crisis is followed by Kairos, which offers new challenges and opportunities.

A fitting comparison regarding a historical aspect of crisis in this (our) geographical context features the 'Baroque hollowness' of Austria by questioning history provocatively. In this epoch, the victorious protagonist strode over the 'hollow stage boards'. His 'progress' was theatrical - marked by Baroque 'bottom-lessness', which allowed all actions to be evoked though ‘grand gestures’, whereupon churches, castles and monasteries celebrated theater – cumulus like, soaring – thus transforming the 'spiritual' into the 'real' (and vice versa). The overwhelming fear of the Turkish military threat at the time was transformed into material beauty through the extensive use of gilding.



Our own current 'hollowness' also appears now and then amid the migration crisis – through the forced transcultural encounter with the ‘other’ – which erodes our “European sense of reality” and security. Does the difference lie between the reconstitution of security back then through a successful military repulsion in comparison to the powerlessness of our current situation amid a crisis of self-confidence in which it is difficult to come up with more peaceful solutions? Or is it that “Catholic Dogmatism” no longer holds sway, and thus seems implausible and antiquated?

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“Hollowness” as a consequence of the destabilizing effect of the loss of faith, on the one hand, and the “emptiness” felt through the loss of faith in ourselves on the other, these are legitimate concerns to explore in such a space. Such insecurities, caused by social upheaval brought on by globalization - once again undermine the perspectives of 'East' and 'West' in a seemingly more regressive manner and culminate in the questioning of already negotiated, Western-influenced values.

COMPROMISE

As a result, any vision of congruent coexistence on our planet currently only allows for a vague compromise on transcultural values that appears weak in the face of a rapidly advancing environmental crisis, which urgently needs to be dealt with. Increasingly changing patterns of social behavior (perpetuated and processed via radical outgrowths of religious and political motives) gives a clouded picture of a world dancing on a volcano. In this context, discursive debates on art (creation) that are often limited to specific terrains and milieus must be fundamentally reconceived and more broadly disseminated.

KNOWLEDGE & SPACE

An exploding ‘tsunami’ of information in all areas - fueled by the 'culture of fun' - is infiltrating the 'guts' of education, increasingly fragmenting traditional structures of perception, schooling and knowledge sharing. As a result, working communities, social- and recreational facilities, have merged and overlapped with one another both spatially and temporally to suggest short-term engagements free of complex orchestration, thus underscoring the value of the experience itself.

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With the progressive fragmentation of time and space, coupled with training initiatives with no ties to real life content, such disruptive activities occur increasingly, for the regeneration and embedding of knowledge into manageable life contexts is an important part of our 'being'.



COMMUNICATION

The ability to communicate is prerequisite for a wide variety of cultural manifestations and seems to be spurred on, for better or worse, through progressively refined media networking techniques (social media). However, it does not make up for the feeling of meaninglessness and disintegration at the interface of perception, reception and the sublimated transference of knowledge. Moreover, the competitive, IT-based, commercial service structures designed for profit growth and optimization are unlikely to counteract concurrently coded behavioral patterns and their body images. These inter-dependencies eventually culminate in the excesses of a post-capitalist social order and hinder communicative education in a humanistic sense, whereby a sophisticated transfer of knowledge contributes to social balance.

Looked at cynically, one could say provocatively: out of the chaotic potpourri of our 'culture of fun' - in the face of the fissures and breaches of the migration crisis – a far-reaching, more inclusive framework for us all can arise – one that shares and 'defends' global terrain while dismissing mutual resentment and mistrust. With an equally effective infrastructure and a truly sustainable ecological direction, a diverse transcultural future is possible!

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Unfortunately a substantial reorientation of art (creation) is definable only in light of worsening facts and struggles to integrate a tragic-fatalistic component of a mourning collective – especially given the seemingly surreal transfer of culture from the '(Middle) East' to 'West' these days.

Despite these challenges, out of the chaos of diverse, ethical communication technologies there can arise more or less a corrective to this 'end of the world'. Communicative knowledge is fluid and guarantees inter-spatial dialogue, where ultimately art (creation) can have an oscillating, healing effect.

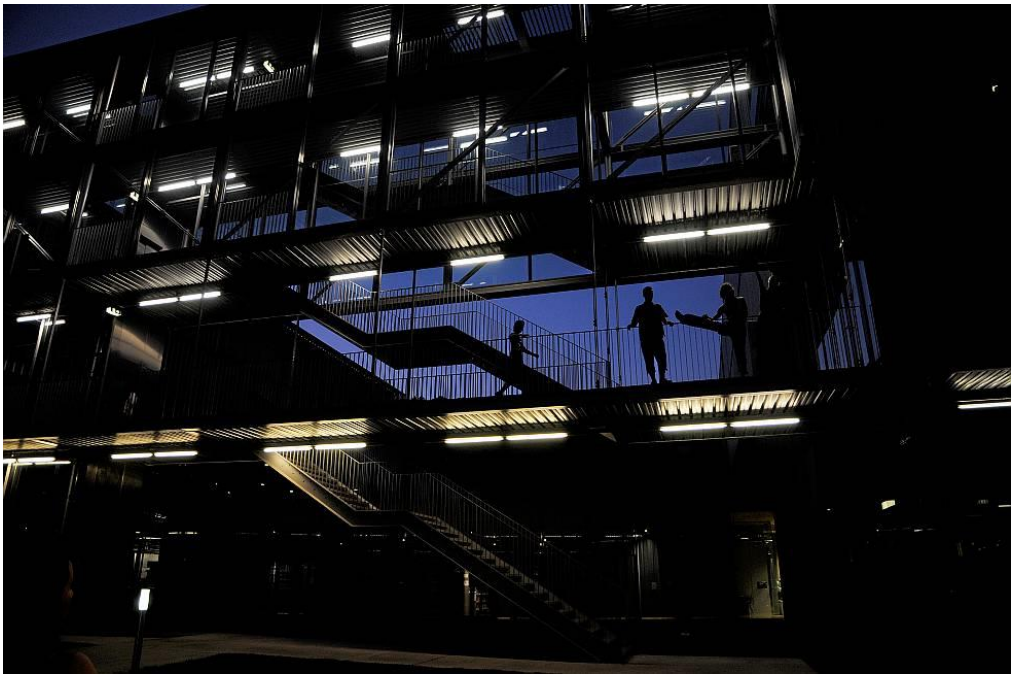


(DANCE) THEATRE ART NOW

The analysis of any 'paradigm shift' in the 'theatre art of the West' manifests itself above all in a shifting of values in the creative process itself, whereby as a result of a change in the modes of production and the course of events, something new may emerge on the horizon. Technical tools and multipliers of all sorts on all levels change the essence of practice at its heart, presenting themselves in figure and form: from subversive, solitary street art to mega-shows, from mass sporting events to traditional festivals. All of these activities seek to be unique, make more or less the same 'avant-garde claims', and thus naturally trigger the inflation of content and aesthetics (through mass appeal). A perpetually animated media presence forwarded by choices in lifestyle and chat-room analyses, has surpassed the transformative events of (dance) theatre art per se. Any fundamental research and orientation suffers from the packaging, marketing and architectural framing involved.

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In this context, one may critically examine the international construction sites (still mostly of postmodern coinage), where star architects compete for representative monuments of European commemoration. Innovative approaches and suitable scenarios and materials with regard to a sustainable orientation of theatre architecture that can remain flexible and without a negative, ecological footprint might have already been invented long ago and suggest regenerative formats and performance practices ... The legacy of theater architect and pioneer Friedrich Kiesler in Vienna remains an insider tip!



THEATRE SUSTAINABILITY

A discussion of content in regards to the compatibility and feasibility of theatre art is only partially successful under the circumstances described. As economic factors in relation to aesthetics and multiplication speak to ethical functionality, the current development curve acts along the economic condition of competitive art institutions/nations. These minimize or eliminate such sophisticated activities thanks to nimble curators who further help to organize and dictate what gets performed. Once the image of theatre art (creation) as a sovereign, aesthetic (and ethical) order and institution has been damaged to its core, hyper-activity and so-called diversity cannot disguise 'hollowness'. In the end, we as theatre creators are as good as our curators and their superior cultural policy-makers, thus our own opportunism and egos are responsible for this precarious situation!

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ESCAPE HOLES

Subversive and sustained artistic development is still to be found in 'off-line' protected terrains, albeit camouflaged and barely discernible amid mega-cities or in the vast steppes of the wasteland where ‘Disneyland’ has not yet arrived. Thus, there is currently little indication that such developments will be critically examined. On the contrary, tourism schemes are torpedoing authentically grown art biotopes that carry the potential for unique art to communicate and educate.



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