

# Returning to Lacanian

Psychoanalytic Theory and the Uses of Language  
in Rehearsal Processes of  
European Contemporary Dance

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# Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel setzte ich mich mit der Rolle und den unterschiedlichen Gebrauchsweisen von Sprache innerhalb kreativer Prozesse des europäischen zeitgenössischen Tanzes auseinander. Indem ich mich hauptsächlich auf die Entstehung von William Forsythes Performance *Sider* (2011) konzentriere, aber auch einige andere Beispiele wie Taneli Törmäs *Effect* (2019) berücksichtige, gehe ich einer Sprache nach, die versucht, Bewegungskonzepte greifbar zu machen. Dabei stützte ich mich auf ein Verständnis von Sprache, das auf die Psychoanalyse Lacans und seiner Theorie des Signifikanten zurückgeht und entwickle eine Lesart seines Werkes, die die vorherrschende Ansicht in Frage stellt, dass innerhalb eines Lacanschen Rahmens der (tanzende) Körper zwangsläufig in seinen Möglichkeiten eingeschränkt ist, weil er in einem kulturellen und ideologischen Raster gefangen bleibt oder sozialer Normativität unterliegt. In dem Versuch einer Revitalisierung Lacans diskutiere ich die einflussreiche Kritik seiner psychoanalytischen Theorie durch Gilles Deleuze und Félix Guattari, deren eigenes philosophisches Werk in der aktuellen Tanzwissenschaft eine große Rolle spielt und in der die Psychoanalyse folglich ihre Anziehungskraft verloren hat. Indem ich nicht nur die Divergenzen, sondern auch die Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Lacan und Deleuze/Guattari beleuchte, möchte ich zeigen, welchen Wert Lacans Sprachtheorie noch immer für die Untersuchung der komplexen Beziehung zwischen sprachlichem Ausdruck und körperlicher Bewegung im zeitgenössischen Tanz haben kann.

## KEYWORDS

Language, dance, body, Lacan, Deleuze

## SCHLÜSSELWÖRTER

Sprache, Tanz, Körper, Lacan, Deleuze

# Summary

In this article, I examine the role and different uses of language within the creative processes of European contemporary dance. Focusing mainly on the creation of William Forsythe's performance *Sider* (2011), but also considering a few other examples such as Taneli Törmä's *Effect* (2019), I trace a search for language that helps to make movement concepts tangible. In doing so, I draw on a concept of language that follows from Lacan's psychoanalysis and his theory of the signifier. By returning to Lacan, I develop a reading of his work that challenges the predominant view that, within a Lacanian framework, the entry into the symbolic order means the (dancing) body is inevitably limited in its possibilities because it is either caught in a cultural and ideological grid, or subject to social normativity. In this attempt to revitalise Lacan, I discuss the influential critique of his psychoanalysis by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose own philosophical work has been particularly prominent in recent dance studies where psychoanalysis consequently lost its interpretative appeal. By shedding light on not only the divergences but also the commonalities between Lacan and Deleuze/Guattari, I intend to show what value Lacan's theorisation of language still might have for probing the complex relationship between linguistic expressions and bodily enactment within contemporary dance.

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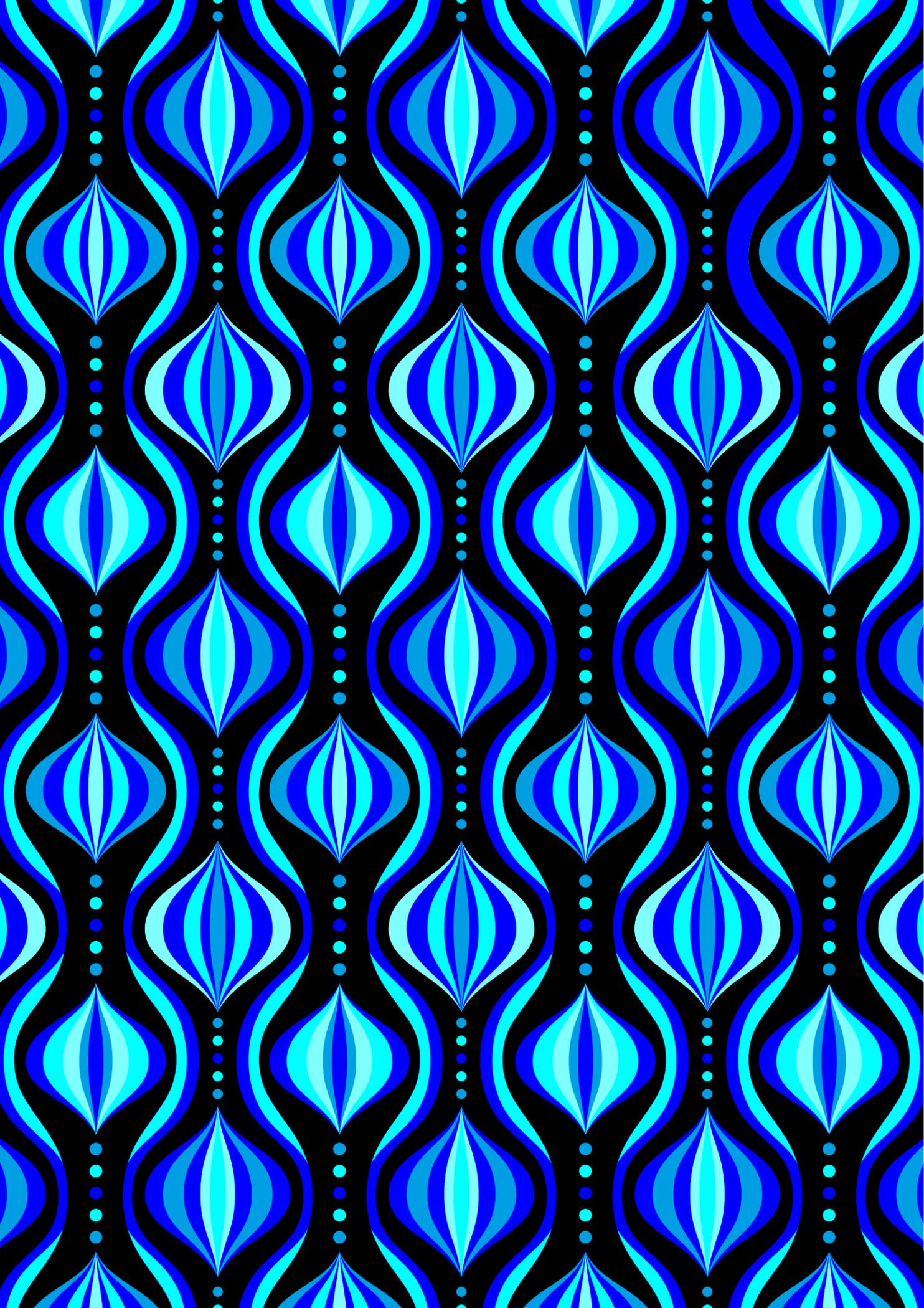
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# Starting Point: The Rehearsals of William Forsythe's *Sider*

Seven dancers move in a large rehearsal studio with a white floor and white walls, located in an old industrial hall. Each of the dancers carries a door-sized piece of brown cardboard, pushing it in front of them and covering their own or other dancers' bodies with it — sometimes completely, sometimes only partially. Some put the cardboard vertically, others hold it horizontally. How they use it seems to change all the time. One moment they are moving it in a directed way, the next they are dragging it along or deliberately hindering their own movement with it. Although the dancers sometimes move fast and get close, they never bump into each other. Neither their bodies, nor the large cardboards ever touch. Instead, sudden turns can be observed at the very moment when two dancers face each other. They all seem to have their own way of moving in space: some stick to their path rigorously, while others react more strongly. However, they always remain a group that never breaks apart. Whilst each individual always seeks contact and confrontation with the others, no one separates or forms a second grouping. All together, these ways of interacting result in a complex activity, even when the movement of each individual may be rather simple. The scene, however, does not reveal a clear principle. There is no apparent image, no straightforward metaphor that could be 'read', no obvious meaning to be recognised in the actions. Instead, there is a compelling formation of bodies and pieces of cardboard that is continuously changing according to its own inner logic that catches and holds the attention of the observer.



William Forsythe's *Sider* performed on the stage of Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden in 2011  
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These impressions are derived from a rehearsal of The Forsythe Company in the midst of the creation process of *Sider*, which premiered in June 2011 at the Festspielhaus Hellerau in Dresden. During this rehearsal on 11 May 2011, about a month before the premiere, choreographer William Forsythe interrupted the activity of the dancers to describe to them why the sequence was working so well in his opinion: ‘You are in the situation that you created by making the rules. This gives it a different form of awareness. [...] There’s a complexity that no one could have choreographed.’<sup>1</sup> To understand what kind of rules William Forsythe is referring to, the documentation of the rehearsal process is revealing. Some of the rules, for instance, are mentioned explicitly in the video annotation — such as: ‘Esther: If Josh [is] in her vision she turns 45 degrees’.<sup>2</sup> But it also becomes perfectly clear from the documentation that these rules are not simply being imposed

by the choreographer on the dancers. Instead, they are developed by the team in a way that creates a system enabling the dancers to move together without the movement being precisely prescribed by one choreographer-as-author.

1. Annotation within the *Piecemaker* rehearsal archive. Annotation ID: 18784, 11.05.2011; Author: Freya.

2. Ibid.

This inside look into the creation of *Sider* is possible thanks to having access to the recordings that The Forsythe Company made of their rehearsals, which include not only digital video but also notes and annotations. Through my own work for Motion Bank, a project that was originally initiated by William Forsythe as part of The Forsythe Company between 2010 and 2014,<sup>3</sup> I have had the opportunity to view excerpts

3. Motion Bank is currently located at Mainz University of Applied Sciences and co-directed by Florian Jenett and Scott deLahunta. The project is dedicated to the development of methods, practices, and tools for the documentation, analysis, and transmission of dance knowledge, choreographic processes, and movement practices using digital media and technologies. For more information on the current work of Motion Bank, see: <https://medium.com/motion-bank> [accessed 14 January 2021].

from the extensive rehearsal documentation, which is otherwise not accessible. There is something unique about these recordings that is directly related to the issues that I want to address in this article. Dance rehearsals recorded on video usually show a selection of moments in which people actually dance because the main purpose of these recordings is to support movement recall, either during the creation of a piece or for later restagings. The recording and retrieval of video material has indeed become an integral part of rehearsal work. As Mark Franko observes, the increasing availability of technology has made it possible for video recording to ‘become a rehearsal methodology’ and for dancers to ‘become adept at reversing the video image to reproduce movement in their own bodies’ (2011: 330). What is rarely recorded, however, are the conversations between the dancers themselves or with the choreographer; the discussions in which experiences, observations, thoughts, and impressions are verbalised. Similarly, even though rules for improvisations, like those described in the example above, are certainly noted down somewhere, they typically remain scattered in the notebooks of dancers, dramaturges, and choreographers. The Forsythe Company tried to overcome such a fragmentary accumulation of unstructured traces by experimenting for six years (2008–2014) with a documentation practice in which almost every rehearsal was not only entirely captured on video, but also supplemented with textual commentaries at the same time as it was recorded using a software program called *Piecemaker*.

Several scholars have already discussed the specificities of the fairly innovative approach developed by The Forsythe Company, mainly addressing the use of new technologies in dance documentation (deLahunta 2015; deLahunta & Jenett 2016; Rittershaus 2020). In this article, I want to shift the general focus of this discourse from technology towards language by asking what role language might play in dance rehearsal.<sup>4</sup> Even though dance is typically considered a non-verbal art-form that takes the moving body as its primary medium, the spoken

← 4. A similar kind of shift from technology to language has recently been pursued by Scott deLahunta (2020), who as a dance scholar has been involved in many projects aimed at the transmission of choreographic knowledge through digital technology.

and written word does serve pivotal functions in creating dance work. Shedding light on these functions, which are often eclipsed by a focus on either the body or technology, is one of the primary aims of this article. To this end, the work of William Forsythe and particularly his

piece *Sider* provide an exemplary case, precisely because of the centrality of language both in the rehearsal studio and on stage. Nonetheless, throughout this article, I will also refer to a few other choreographers, such as Taneli Törmä or Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, and consider how they use specific terms or verbal descriptions to communicate about their artistic intentions or choreographic principles.

A screenshot of the *Piecemaker* recording and annotation software used by the Forsythe Company to document rehearsals. This moment shows the common work of dancers and choreographer concerning the rules for moving in a group together with the cardboards. Annotations by Freya Vass-Rhee.

The screenshot shows the PIECEMAKER software interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with 'About Piecemaker', 'Pieces', and 'Admin'. Below the menu, the current video is identified as 'Sider' with the file name '20110511\_004\_Sider.mp4' and the storage location 's3 D: tfc.piecemaker.org'. The user is identified as 'tfc-admin'.

On the left side, there are buttons for 'Edit Video Information' and 'Scratchpad'. Below these, there is a section for 'Click on a name to turn on/off events.' with the name 'Freya' listed. At the bottom left, there are buttons for 'Hide All' and 'Show All'.

The central part of the interface is a video player showing a rehearsal in a studio. The video has a progress bar at the bottom indicating a total duration of 52:55. Below the video player, there are navigation buttons: '<-30m', '<-10m', '<-5m', '<-1m', '<-5s', '+1m->', '+5m->', '+10m->', and '+30m->'. There are also buttons for 'New Annotation', 'New Sub Annotation', and 'New Marker (ctrl-v)'. At the very bottom, there are buttons for '<- prev' and 'next ->'.

On the right side, there is a list of annotations. The first annotation is at 02m18s, titled 'Discussion of April 22 material (from start of video)'. The second annotation is at 03m32s, titled 'Group with rules and slowing down before goal', marked with four stars. The third annotation is at 06m43s, titled 'Going again. Includes rule of reversing to avoid bumping. Esther: If Josh in her vision she turns 45 degrees Josh Fabrice: Ander'. The fourth annotation is at 09m27s, titled 'Again with change of rule person and changing back.', with a detailed description: 'It's only interested if we can see that you are thinking and strategizing; then you are interesting and obscured, and interesting again and obscured. Occasionally you can break the rule e.g. of slowing down before goal; we will notice the shift in dynamics.' The fifth annotation is at 20m28s, titled 'Again', with a description: 'Jones stays with same two people; others alternate between person A and anyone else; We get hypnotized by the idea of producing but there's a lot of production going on in the scene; we have to find a level where it is still discursive.' The sixth annotation is at 24m11s, titled 'Again focusing on feel of the board (VERY GOOD RUN)', with a detailed description: 'The mood changed in the last couple of minutes as you got deeper into it. In the non-connected one it looks like the order came from above; this one looks like the decision came from you and you are in the situation created by the rules; gives a different form of attention, and there's a complexity that no one could have choreographed. If it stays that focused it can sustain itself because you see both the people and the boards, but otherwise it does not work.'

# Going Against the Tide: Revitalising Lacan

To illuminate the role and uses of language in dance rehearsal processes, I want to return to the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, primarily because he provides a specific account of language that might be valuable for my endeavour here. As Slavoj Žižek explains, language within a Lacanian framework does not correspond to ‘a Habermasian ideal form of argumentation and communication’, but rather refers to ‘language in all its inconsistent materiality, full of overlapping, holes, and lateral links’ (2017: 41).<sup>5</sup> In this regard, an important aspect of Lacan’s approach — one that is also crucial for my purposes — is how he strives to undermine the dualism between ‘body’ (material) and ‘language’ (immaterial). The potential for overcoming such dualisms is not exclusive to a Lacanian approach and, as I will demonstrate, there are intriguing crossovers with some of his fiercest critics in this respect as well.

Yet why do I propose ‘returning to Lacan’? This question needs to be raised since, within the field of dance and performance studies, making reference to Lacan might seem like an outdated, even obsolete, move. Dance scholar Stefan Apostolou-Hölscher provides some of the theoretical background for this rather devalued status of Lacanian psychoanalysis. He observes how, from the 2000s onwards, dance studies has increasingly shifted away from ‘rather text-centred performative

5. Even though throughout this article I will draw on Slavoj Žižek to clarify certain Lacanian concepts, I want to point out that I do not necessarily affirm his reading of Lacan beyond the discussed aspects. Especially with regard to feminist and queer theory, Žižek’s stance can be quite infuriating. The same applies to his attacks on so-called particularism or the attempt of certain minorities to (re-)claim their identity as a group. A critical discussion of Žižek’s universalism is offered by Mari Ruti (2018).

theories, such as that [*sic*] advanced by Judith Butler’ (2014: 79). While the 1990s are marked by the discursivisation of the body that helped ‘dance become more intellectual and self-reflexive’, Apostolou-Hölscher notes how this perspective hardly allows one to imagine bodies outside of a cultural and ideological grid (*ibid.*). A ‘body being understood in terms of language’ can parody the grid and subvert discourse, but it can hardly create ‘new concepts of what it can do’ (*ibid.*). What is known as the ‘linguistic turn’ was thus followed by the so-called ‘affective turn’, which in dance studies served to foreground ‘affective bodies’ (*ibid.*: 81) with ‘their capacity to affect and to *be affected*’ (*ibid.*: 82).

While it is not my intention to contradict the importance of ‘affect’ for dance or other fields of research, the heightened focus on the body’s sensations and innate potentialities does seem to have led to a lack of attention upon the role of language and discursive knowledge in embodied practices like dance.<sup>6</sup> Close observation of creative processes in dance, however, clearly reveals the continued importance of spoken and also written language, which prompts the Lacanian perspective that I will be adopting here. According to philosopher Mari Ruti, Lacanian theory and affect theory ‘are frequently pitted against each other as wholly discordant’ (2018: 4). Indeed, in terms of theoretical paradigms, my proposal for a Lacanian approach seems to conflict with the philosophical foundations of the ‘affective turn’, as developed most notably by Brian Massumi (2015) and Erin Manning (2013), who both draw extensively on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his work in collaboration with Félix Guattari. Even beyond the ‘affective turn’, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari seems to have a predominant role in dance and performance studies today. Whilst Laura Cull in her volume *Deleuze and Performance* could still posit that ‘Deleuze remains strangely

6. For a similar critique on how the affective turn has deflected attention away from the interaction between sensory experience and discursive kinds of knowledges, particularly in relation to re-enactment as a form of affective historiography, see De Laet (2017).

neglected' (2009: 4) within performance studies — particularly when compared to the influence of deconstruction — only half a decade later, and especially in dance studies, many works refer to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Lepecki 2006; Sabisch 2011; Cvejić 2015; Lepecki 2016; Burt 2017).<sup>7</sup>

Given my aim to offer a Lacanian counter-proposal to this predominance, it will be necessary to address the infamous 'rupture' between Deleuze/Guattari and Lacan while also taking a closer look at their commonalities. Nonetheless, my primary aim in this article is to elucidate the specific value of Lacan's 'negative' ontology and his theory of the subject of the unconscious for probing the complex relationship between dance and language. Lacan's thinking, I will argue, is particularly pertinent for any reinforced engagement with 'language' that wants to circumvent the equation of language with the construction of meaning as well as with the subordination of the body to discourse or normative ideologies.

## The Impossibility of the Law

To get a better idea of how language can be used as a devising strategy in dance creation beyond the development of a system of rules, I want to return to the rehearsals for *Sider*. The prominent function of language in the creation of this piece is poignantly described by former Forsythe Company dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee. In her 2019 text *Haunted by Hamlet: Devising William Forsythe's Sider*, Vass-Rhee recounts how various linguistic means — including spoken language, written words, and signs

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that differentiating between Deleuze and Guattari and their respective influence can be difficult. Even when scholars primarily identify with Deleuze's thinking, the volumes he co-authored with Guattari are frequently referenced as well.

— were used throughout the choreographic process. At the beginning of the rehearsal period, for example, Forsythe conducted a humorous mock interview with the dancers, pretending the premiere had already taken place and interviewing them about it. Vass-Rhee explains how this interview was subsequently incorporated into the rehearsal process:

From this dialogue [...] emerged a list of over 100 neologisms like *bohemian girl opera*, *grounded Luft*, *Fabricabun*, and *victory legumes*. Returning to a mapping process he had used during the making of *ALIE/N A(C)TION* in 1992, Forsythe [...] told the dancers to map the terms onto paper in any way that made sense to them. The dancers would then choreographically translate their maps into the full space of the room however they individually chose (2019: 460-461).

The resulting maps were further transformed and eventually provided the dancers with individual scores that were combined in various ways, not only during the rehearsal process but also when the piece was performed on stage. As Vass-Rhee mentions, the method of creating maps that were translated choreographically was not first introduced for *Sider* but already used in Forsythe's earlier piece *ALIE/N A(C)TION* (1992). In his discussion of this latter work, dance and theatre scholar Gerald Siegmund usefully considers the challenges the mapping method poses to the dancers:

First, bodies and their movements here are always linked to, hooked up with, and engendered by specific chains of signifiers. [...] Second, the maps created provide a surplus of potential information that is impossible to realize in its totality. The bodies of the dancers are constantly confronted by an impossibility that positions them in a specific relation to the document (Siegmund 2012: 208).



A moment from William Forsythe's *Sider*, performed at Festspielhaus Hellerau Dresden in 2011  
© Dominik Mentzos

The impossibilities Siegmund hints at essentially consist of two components that are also at work in Forsythe's *Sider*. On the one hand, some of the information relayed to the dancers may confront them with impossible tasks. When performing *Sider*, for example, the dancers may receive live instructions asking them to count the lace holes of the shoes of all the other dancers while they need to continue dancing and fulfilling other tasks.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, it is impossible for the dancers to pay attention to every layer of information they receive, which in the case of *Sider* includes live directions, rules systems, maps and their choreographic translations. While performing, they can only respond selectively to these prompts and make their own spontaneous decisions about what to include and how to perform it. Ultimately, Siegmund claims, Forsythe's approach results in a dance that is seen with a choreography underlying it:

The impossibility of the tasks leads to a choreography that cannot be realized in total. What the audience sees during a performance is always only a version of that spurious abstract totality encoded in signs, letters, and graphemes that can appear nowhere in its totality. (Siegmund 2012: 209)

What interests me in Siegmund's perspective on Forsythe's choreographic practice is the larger theoretical framework informing his view, which is in fact a Lacanian understanding of the relation between the dancing body and choreography. Referring to the origins of choreography in Thoinot Arbeau's 1589 treatise *Orchésographie* and to André Lepecki's use of this text to define choreography 'as an answer to a call from and for the law' (2006: 26), Siegmund likewise aligns choreography with the law. The difference is that Siegmund conceives of the 'law'

8. This is an example of a live instruction from the documentation of the premiere of *Sider* (video '20110616\_003\_Sider.mp4' within the *Piecemaker* rehearsal archive, 0:42:20).

in a thoroughly Lacanian sense. According to Dylan Evans' *Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996), the law for Lacan denotes a legal-linguistic structure that is 'in fact no more and no less than the symbolic order itself' (1996: 101). Consequently, insofar as the aforementioned maps, graphemes, rules, and instructions belong to the symbolic order, Siegmund conceives of them as the Other<sup>9</sup> of dance and defines their relationship to the body as one of alterity. Thus he claims that 'in the absence between the body and its manifold possibilities of moving and choreography, a negotiation of the relation between body and law takes place' (2012: 212).

When choreography is conceptualised in this particular way, it seems indeed questionable to speak only of a one-directionally imposed set of rules and norms, as Lepecki's understanding of choreography as law suggests. Whereas Siegmund asserts that this configuration opens up a space for the subject to appear, from another (non-Lacanian) perspective the body might appear limited in 'what it can do'. The body seems to be deprived of the possibility to free itself from or to overturn the norms inscribed in the symbolic order. To put it bluntly, what is at stake here is the creative potential of the dancing body to be aesthetically as well as politically productive.

9. For Lacan, the big Other denotes radical alterity, which he equates with language and the law, and as such it is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. The big Other is actually the symbolic order insofar as it stands for the other subject (in a secondary sense) and at the same time for the symbolic order that mediates the relationship to the other subject (Evans 1996: 136).

# Lacan vs. Deleuze vs. Guattari

The question of how much agency the body can have within a Lacanian framework is one of the most contested issues in the critique of Lacanian psychoanalysis and his theory of the signifier in particular. This critique is probably articulated most influentially in the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their philosophy centres on the topic of the autonomous, unlimited capacity of the body, its productive force, and its independence from a symbolic layer. This is why, as I will discuss more in depth below, their thinking is particularly intriguing for dance practitioners and dance scholars alike. ‘What matters in a Deleuzian universe’, philosopher Peter Hallward notes, ‘is the creation or production of something, not its representation or signification’ (2010: 45-46). In contrast, as Alenka Zupančič observes, it is quite commonly and frequently asserted that ‘psychoanalysis only disintegrates, dismantles, separates, it is obsessed with negativity and lack, it never amounts to any affirmative, positive project (be it political or simply “human”)’ (2008: 38). These assumptions are sometimes coupled with accusations that Lacanian psychoanalysis sustains or even advocates heteronormativity, sexism, gender duality, and the traditional family model, as for example raised by Didier Eribon in his manifesto *Echapper à la psychanalyse* (2005).

Although these accusations have been rejected many times and shown to be weak (Zupančič 2017; Ruti 2017), their regular recurrence might convey the impression that there is a kind of compliance of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory with the prevailing normative (capitalist, heterosexual, androcentric) order. While it is true that Lacan is concerned with how subjects enter the symbolic order and cope with it (including

the norms it entails), he does not advocate normativity. He rather points out that the symbolic order — or what he calls ‘the big Other’ — is in itself inherently unstable because there is no position that could ensure its power. As Lacan explains, ‘I have absolutely no guarantee that this Other, owing to what he has in his system, can give me back, if I may express myself thus, what I gave him — namely, his being and his essence as truth. As I told you, there is no Other of the Other’ (Lacan 2019: 299). Lacan’s statement that ‘there is no Other of the Other’ can be understood to mean that there is no ‘objective’ point of view outside of the symbolic order that ultimately could justify and guarantee the prevailing symbolic (and normative) relations entailed by this order.

It is well known that, in their first co-authored volume *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari strongly oppose some central concepts of psychoanalysis. For Slavoj Žižek, who polemically calls *Anti-Oedipus* ‘arguably Deleuze’s worst book’ (2004: 18), the cause for this purported ‘rupture’ with psychoanalysis is evident: Félix Guattari. Seconding this perception, Adrian Johnston states that the philosophy of the ‘non-Guattarianised Deleuze of 1967-9 [...] cross-resonate[s] strikingly with Lacanian psychoanalysis’ (2017: 194), specifically referring to Deleuze’s *Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), *Difference and Repetition* (1968), and *The Logic of Sense* (1969).<sup>10</sup> Even within *Anti-Oedipus*, it seems worth recognising that Lacan himself ‘continues to appear as more of an ally than an opponent’ (Hallward 2010: 33). For instance,

<sup>10</sup> It is striking that, at least at first glance, there is less literature dealing specifically with Guattari’s relationship to Lacan, which may be due to the fact that Guattari’s single-authored writings received less attention compared to Deleuze’s. However, there are some stronger biographical links since the psychiatrist Guattari attended Lacan’s earlier seminars. Moreover, as Janell Watson writes in *Guattari’s Diagrammatic Thought*, Guattari claimed ‘that he broke with the Lacanians, especially Miller, but never with Lacan himself’ (2009: 43). Watson emphasises that Guattari was ‘demonstrably inspired by Lacan’s formulas and topologies’ (*ibid.*: 16) and sheds light on some of the concepts that Guattari took from Lacan.

Deleuze and Guattari are definitely honouring Lacan's alternative take on Freud's Oedipus, as he refuses to 'enclose the unconscious in an Oedipal structure' but shows that Oedipus is 'nothing but an image' (Deleuze and Guattari 1972: 310; quoted in Hallward 2010: 33). Nonetheless, the noticeable proximity to Lacan clearly diminished in the course of the 1970s and, when Deleuze and Guattari publish *A Thousand Plateaus* in 1980, it is clear that 'nothing remains of their alliance with Lacan' (Hallward 2010: 34). This gradual distancing from Lacan, however, is certainly not only on account of Guattari's influence. Cross-resonances and intersections between Lacan and Deleuze should not obscure the fact that there are fundamental differences between the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and the philosophy of Deleuze that make the two strands of thought difficult to reconcile. The Spinozist Deleuze, because of his insistence on the motif of the univocity of being, is hardly compatible with psychoanalysis. Whilst Lacan's theory is grounded in a fundamental lack that operates as a principle of negativity, Spinoza's rejection of negativity results, following Žižek, in the exclusion of 'the very symbolic order' and allows only for 'a purely positive network of causes and effects in which, by definition, an absence cannot play any positive role' (2004: 31).

## Deleuzian Dance Studies

When compared to Lacan, there seem to be various aspects to Deleuze and Guattari's thinking that make their philosophy particularly appealing with regard to dance. To put it somewhat stereotypically, the differences between Deleuze and Guattari vis-à-vis Lacan can be seen as running between creativity and positivity versus negation and lack; multiple forms of expression versus the dominance of language; the capacity

to transform versus the restraining entanglement in a net of signifiers. Authors in dance studies rely on Deleuze and Guattari directly and indirectly in different ways and their positions sometimes openly contradict each other, yet they have a common ground in recognising a distinct potential in Deleuze's philosophy (including his joint work with Guattari). André Lepecki, for instance, explains Deleuze's value for dance studies through the shared interest in the specificity of bodily activity:

If there is one contribution I would like to propose to dance studies it is to consider in which ways choreography and philosophy share that same fundamental political, ontological, physiological, and ethical question that Deleuze recuperates from Spinoza and from Nietzsche: what can a body do? (Lepecki 2006: 6)

By drawing on Deleuze and his Spinozist leanings, Lepecki develops a view on dance according to which the body can only bear out its full capacity through the active encounter with affections, for which it must free itself from choreographic capture. Rather than developing a critique on choreography as a system of codification, dance scholar Bojana Cvejić relies on Deleuze for his critical stance toward representation and more specifically the tendency within philosophy to subordinate difference to identity or essences. Favouring Deleuze's contrasting 'expressionist' philosophy, Cvejić explains her interest as follows:

My approach is largely rooted in Deleuze's (and Spinoza's) philosophy, first and foremost regarding their understanding of expression and difference as ontological principles, and secondarily, regarding several ideas and concepts found therein that relate to expression, such as the agency of assembling (agencement), becoming affect, and sensation (Cvejić 2015: 16-17).

When foregrounding the influence of Deleuze and Spinoza on her approach to dance, Cvejić additionally avows that her ‘reading of Deleuze remains purposefully partial’ and that ‘we won’t be seeking yet another Deleuzian ally in dance’ (3). However, even if Deleuze’s theory is not entirely and fundamentally affirmed, there are definitely aspects to his thinking that seem to make it particularly interesting for grasping those kinds of performances that, as Cvejić claims, ‘cannot be accounted for by representational notions of thought’ and which defy straightforward interpretations that rely on ‘drawing a correspondence between certain forms of movement or bodies and a meaning’ (2015: 30).

Although Jacques Lacan develops a new conception of representation that arguably does not function in the sense criticised by Cvejić, it is true — as Peter Hallward notes — that Lacan does away with ‘any immediately expressive or productive conception of desire, being, or reality’ (2010: 44). The ‘positive’ or ‘affirmative’ perspective of Deleuzian-informed theory can thus be conceived in apparent contradiction with the ‘negative’ assumptions of Lacanian psychoanalysis. As such, scholarly discourse on dance seems to implicitly perpetuate Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of Lacan’s theory of the signifier. This criticism is primarily targeted at the primacy Lacan attributes to signification and the symbolic (in the sense that the symbol constitutes the human subject and not vice versa) as well as at the assertion of an ontological negativity. Both aspects thus deserve further scrutiny if we want to assess the value of Lacan’s thinking for theorising the role of the body and language in dance.

## The Role of the Signifier and the Impasses of Symbolic Logic

A closer look at one of Lacan’s fundamental assumptions with regard to the role of signifiers indeed reveals an understanding that seems hard to reconcile with the advocacy of an indefinite potential of the body. Rather, ‘creativity’ is ascribed to signifiers and their organising effects:

Before any experience, before any individual deduction, [...] [b]efore strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports, supports that are arranged in themes of opposition. Nature provides — I must use the word — signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them (Lacan 2004: 20).

According to Lacan, the subject is exposed to the autonomous operations of signifiers rather than being in control of them. Since the subject is subject *to* a system of symbolic creation that it does not have in its own hands, it must orient itself according to relations that have already been determined. It is not difficult to see how an assumption like this easily slips into the idea that the subject, and by analogy the body, is caught in a web of signifiers and gets stuck in a ‘cultural and ideological grid’ from which there is no way out.

However, even though Lacan places a strong emphasis on the laws of the symbolic, he is also fundamentally concerned with theorising the limits and dysfunctions of the law or the impasses of symbolic logic.

Common examples, like slips of the tongue, reveal such dysfunctions and indicate that there are discontinuities and disruptions in the chain of signifiers. The Lacanian subject may be exposed to the autonomous operations of the chain of signifiers, but it is not engulfed by this chain and rather marks the point of non-integration or malfunction (Shepherdson 2008: 12). It is also important to remember that in addition to the dimension of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real are of equal importance for Lacan. In fact, Lacan increasingly emphasised the inseparability of these three registers in his later seminars (see Collett 2017: 118). It is when we speak of the limits of the symbolic order that we encounter the dimension of the real, which according to Lacan is linked to the body and sexuality. Nevertheless, the Lacanian real does not denote a pre-linguistic reality, nor does it refer to a 'natural' or 'biological' body; rather, the real is related to a lack that arises within the symbolic order.<sup>11</sup> This brings us to the ontological negativity that, as we will see, also informs Lacan's view on language but which first needs some further unpacking.

Zupančič explains how for Lacan a missing signifier is constitutive of the signifying order to the extent that the symbolic always appears with a built-in lack. She also points out that 'it is *in the place of this gap* or negativity *that appears the surplus-enjoyment*' (2017: 42; original italics). Enjoyment, as conceptualised by Lacan, is thus linked to the signifying order in a very specific way. Instead of being directly connected to the signifying order, enjoyment only comes to play its role through the lack or constitutive negativity of the signifying order:

11. This particular conception of the body is for Charles Shepherdson one of the key reasons why psychoanalysis is still relevant. 'If psychoanalysis has taken on an increasing urgency today', he claims in *Lacan and the Limits of Language*, it is because 'psychoanalysis has perhaps the clearest conception of the real of the body as a material dimension of the flesh that exceeds representation, yet does not automatically refer us to a "natural" domain of "preexisting reality"' (2008: 40).

This negativity is the the Real of the junction between the (missing) signifier and enjoyment; and the conceptual name for this configuration in psychoanalysis is sexuality (or the sexual). Sexuality is coextensive with the effect of the signifying gap, at the place of which surplus-enjoyment emerges, on the rest of the signifying chain (ibid.).

Zupančič treats sexuality as a logical or ontological problem, emphasising the 'negative ontology' of Lacanian psychoanalysis for which it is decisive that something is not there, missing. In her view, this is the only way to approach the dimension of the real. If we instead would consider sexuality as a matter of the body and its sensations, we would always end up in the imaginary realm. In Zupančič's reading of Lacan, however, sexuality is neither to be located outside the signifying order (discourse) nor is it represented by a signifier, but it rather serves as the placeholder for the missing signifier. It emerges through the lack and at the same time it is 'the *messy sewing up* of this gap' (2017: 43).

The Lacanian conception of 'language' follows the same configuration. Lacan's 'logic of the signifier' is predicated on a missing signifier because it is only then that signifiers start to 'run' across this gap and can relate to each other. 'In this sense', Zupančič claims, 'speech itself is already a response to the missing signifier, which *is not* (there)' (2017: 47). In Žižek's words, the gap of the missing signifier is 'the gap of an impossibility [that] language tries to cope with' (2017: 41). Once again it becomes clear that the symbolic order cannot constitute itself as a consistent one, nor can language function without gaps, inconsistencies, and disruptions. In this respect, the absent signifier points to the ontological lack but only to reveal that this gap is 'productive' insofar as it has to be permanently bridged. We might further want to note that the same logic applies to the body, given that 'the constitution of the body also depends on [...] the symbolic containment of lack' (Shepherdson 2008: 5).

Lacan himself must have realised that the notion of ‘language’ does not necessarily convey what it should within psychoanalysis.<sup>12</sup> He therefore introduced the term *lalangue*:

And what we know how to do with llanguage [notation for *lalangue* by translator Bruce Fink; author’s note] goes well beyond what we can account for under the heading of language. Language affects us first of all by everything it brings with it by way of effects that are affects. If we can say that the unconscious is structured like a language, it is in the sense that the effects of llanguage, already there qua knowledge, go well beyond anything the being who speaks is capable of enunciating (Lacan 1999: 139).

Lacan’s notion of *lalangue* thus exceeds our common understanding of language as a *system* for relaying information through verbal or written communication. It rather points to the affective aspect of language, yielding a sort of enjoyment through the interplay of ambiguities. Moreover, *lalangue* can be understood as something ‘prior to language’, in the sense that language as a system (*langage*) is composed of *lalangue*. Interestingly, when Lacan states that the effects of *lalangue* manifest themselves by means of affects, he resorts to a term that will come to stand central in the overtly Deleuzian-inspired ‘affect theory’. This again raises the question whether Lacanian and Deleuzian strands of thought are really that incommensurable as generally perceived.

12. Notably, the English word ‘language’ stands for two different French words, namely ‘langue’ and ‘langage’: ‘langue usually refers to a specific language, such as French or English, whereas *langage* refers to the system of language in general, abstracted from all particular languages. It is fundamentally the general structure of language (*langage*), rather than the differences between particular languages (*langues*) that interests Lacan’ (Evans 1996: 99).

# Choreographing Language

Returning to the creative process of William Forsythe’s *Sider*, we now might be able to identify a use of language that resembles more Lacan’s notion of *lalangue*. The mock interview that formed the starting point for the maps, for example, was specifically used as a game to escape from a language that produces meaning, and at the same time to generate absurd word combinations (e.g. ‘bohemian girl opera, grounded Luft, Fabricabun, and victory legumes’) through our ability to make contingent associations. During rehearsals, other forms of improvisation emerged that, to a certain extent, aimed to avoid a communication-oriented and controlled use of language, counting instead on its autonomous effects. Dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee describes how, more or less by chance, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* came to the fore from a larger corpus of literary and discursive texts that accompanied the process, yet without *Sider* becoming a Hamlet adaptation. She interestingly positions the treatment of the text within the artistic development of Forsythe’s oeuvre since the 2000s, when he ‘increasingly focused on the choreographic affordances of the sounds of speech itself’ (2019: 457). Whilst the content of the text becomes more or less irrelevant, the rhythmic structure is taken up and transferred to physical action. Sometimes the text is reproduced through the use of polyglossia or through the incomprehensible imitation of the words and then turned into the vocal part of the piece’s soundtrack. In the case of *Sider*, for example, there were moments during rehearsal when the dancers only looked at the *Hamlet* text for a very short time and then repeated it immediately afterwards, partly in their various mother tongues instead of English. What they could not remember, they were supposed to fill with babble, vocal sounds, or associated voice modulations. The rhythm and dynamics of

this idiosyncratic language was at the same time translated into physical movement, which influenced the babbling in reciprocal action.<sup>13</sup>

In order to slightly broaden my scope beyond Forsythe's devising strategies and the role of language therein, I want to turn to another choreographer whose work in the rehearsal studio illuminates the role of communication, verbal descriptions, and specific namings during the process of creating dance. The following excerpt is taken from my own documentation of the rehearsal process of *Effect* (2019), a choreography developed in close collaboration between Finnish choreographer Taneli Törmä and five dancers of the *tanzmainz* dance company at the Staatstheater Mainz:

**Taneli Törmä** [*choreographer*]: One thing about the focus. It's when you are in the 'Breakdancing'. You are there. I'm going to be— I'm sitting there [*indicating where the dancers are moving and from where he is watching*]. Normally it's somehow that when...when you are you stopping here... My— or I'm stopping— This is the circle [*showing where the dancers were moving in a circle before*]. And it's something— that there is something [*turning in spirals*]— Whoom. My eyes are going to there [*stopping and looking in a clear direction outside the stage area*]. And then I'm again in here [*moving in spirals again*], I don't— I can not see nothing before I— Yes. And I would like to have *Whoom* always outside.

**Amber Pansters** [*dancer*]: And are you, do you also move... for the Spirals back again? Or is it like the steps here? Keeps going in the same direction?

**TT**: I think when it's going like this, it's not— you don't do it. It's only... it's— If I'm doing it like this [*again turning in spirals*]: *Whoom... Whoom*. I'm just— And then when I'm going— yes!<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>. Of course, such unconventional uses of language cannot be accounted for exclusively by a Lacanian theoretical framework. In light of the rather ambiguous relationship between Deleuze and Lacan, it may be particularly interesting to consider Deleuze's notion of 'esoteric words', which he puts forward in *The Logic of Sense* (1969).



A video-still from the documentation of the rehearsals for Taneli Törmä's *Effect* in 2018 at Staatstheater Mainz, showing the dancers' and Törmä's work on what they called 'Breakdancing' or 'Breakdancer' at that time. Video: David Rittershaus.

The passage indicates how choreographer Taneli Törmä is searching for the 'right' words to describe a certain quality to the dancers that is related to the orientation of the gaze and which he would like to develop further. In doing so, he is responding to how he just perceived the dancers carrying out a specific choreographic phrase called 'Breakdancing'. However, language does seem to show its limitations — whilst Törmä makes clear that he wants to refine the dancers' focus, his sentences are fragmentary and interspersed with physical demonstrations of movements that he does not put into words. Moreover, for a quality for which he seems to have no concept, he uses the vocal gesture 'Whoom'.

← <sup>14</sup>. <https://betweenus.motionbank.org/#/mosys/grids/3b99d756-aed4-4112-9fb5-e8362e349b6f>, video recording with subtitles, 25 September 2018, [accessed on 29 September 2020].

It must be acknowledged that in the particular example of Törmä and his dancers, few of them are speaking in their mother tongue. Even though this is very common in dance, it might put additional constraints on the attempt to find words for either specific movements or more general expressive qualities. However, apart from fluency in language, it can often be observed in dance rehearsals how those involved begin to search for wordings and descriptions for that ungraspable ‘something’ happening between bodies; for ‘something’ that is definitely there but not easy to verbalise. A linguistic gap is left where a physical gesture stands in for ‘something’ that cannot — or at least not easily — be verbally expressed. Instead, a non-linguistic vocal gesture takes the place of a term. My own phrasing here should give us pause, since it might suggest a distance between language and movement — if not a downright ‘failure of language’ — in the sense that words do not come close (enough) to the bodily dimension. But does this distance really exist? Or must we not assume that the inconsistencies in the wording of movement have more to do with the fundamental gap that language always already tries to cope with? Does it not rather have to do with the fact that language and the body find their common ground in trying to circumvent a constitutive lack, which is revealed when language cannot simply speak *for* the body but also *with* the body? The materiality of language, as put forward by Lacan, would support this conception. After all, Lacan avows that ‘speech is in fact a gift of language, and language is not immaterial. It is a subtle body, but body it is. Words are caught up in all the body images that captivate the subject’ (2006: 248).

While Lacan recognises close connections between words and bodies, at the same time he opposes the idea that language can enter into a transparent, neutral relationship with the objects it speaks about. The subject’s position is always already inscribed in it. This does not mean that the world and all the things out there do not exist without us or that we create them by means of language, but rather that we are

too much entangled with the world to be able to speak about it objectively from a detached point of view. Exactly this assumption leads to Lacan’s expression that ‘there is no metalanguage’ (Lacan 2006: 688). With this claim, Lacan aims to go against the scientific ideals of logical positivism, asserting that there is no language that could describe the world from the position of an ‘objective’ distance. For Lacan, terms, titles, or labels that can be mistaken for meta-linguistic designations actually serve a different function: they stand in for a missing idea that cannot be directly designated and which requires a substitute to be expressed. For such a stand-in, Lacan uses the term *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, which he translates as ‘representation’s representative’ but which literally would mean ‘ideational representative’. While Lacan adopts this term from Freud, in his own view it ‘is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, qua represented’ (Lacan 2004: 63). With his understanding of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, Lacan does not simply refer to the mental representation of a thing, but to a placeholder for what is missing on the level of representation. It stands in for something which is not there; something absent or even repressed; something that cannot be located in any of the positive features of the object represented.

In the rehearsal excerpt quoted above, we can probably understand ‘Breakdancing’ as a name or title that takes on the function of a *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*. As aforementioned, the term ‘Breakdancing’ refers to the section of the choreography that Törmä and his dancers are working on. In the way Törmä uses it, the name has nothing to do with breakdance as a dance style, but is related to the fairground carousel often called *Breakdancer*. The choreography of the five dancers in this section is indeed reminiscent of this type of carousel, as there is a circular movement of the group, while each dancer also spins around their own axis. Even though the title ‘Breakdancing’ tells us something about the formal composition of the movement, it neither really describes the phrase as it is, nor does it stand in for everything that comprises this

section. There is a lot more going on, including a specific way of using steps and differences in how the dancers relate to each other, which influences the spatial proximity and distance between them. The name, however, can be used in the context of rehearsals, in the communication within the team, and in written notes. As such, it refers to the movement with its specific qualities, functioning as a kind of index.

Similar examples of names functioning like indexes can be found in documents of other creative processes.<sup>15</sup> In the mixed-media publication *En Attendant & Cesena: A Choreographer's Score* by choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and performance theorist and musicologist Bojana Cvejić, one can discover in the textbook and DVDs a choreographic phrase called 'Parkinson Phrase', named after dancer Chrysa Parkinson. In this case, the title of the phrase does not reveal anything about the movement it aims to designate and rather functions like a personal name. In the textbook, however, the phrase is characterised as follows: 'abstract contours with refined details in extremities, in feet and how they touch the floor, how hands are articulated in the movement [...], proportioned mathematically, the phrase conveys a mysterious sense of narrative' (De Keersmaeker and Cvejić 2013: 47). On the DVD, De Keersmaeker talks further about the phrase, its role in the creative process, and how it was first developed by Chrysa Parkinson. Finally, the video shows Parkinson performing the phrase. The descriptions and characterisations and especially the demonstration give us an impression of what the phrase is about. The multimedial format of *A Choreographer's Score* thus reveals that the name 'Parkinson

<sup>15</sup>. In addition to the examples introduced here, one could also refer to the choreographic centre ICK Amsterdam, which conducted research on the so-called 'pre-choreographic elements' in the work of choreographer Emio Greco and dramaturge Pieter C. Scholten. Their aim was to identify specific names and terms, such as 'Abracadabra' or 'Around Ball', that might allow us to grasp particular moving concepts that inform the eventual choreographies. See <https://www.ickamsterdam.com/en/academy/dance-professionals/pre-choreographic-elements-9> [accessed 29 September 2020].



A moment from the rehearsals of *Effect* by choreographer Taneli Törmä and the dancers of the *tanzmainz* dance company at Staatstheater Mainz in 2018. Photo: De-Da-Productions.

Phrase' functions as a placeholder that not only makes it possible to refer to the phrase linguistically, but also stands for its physical enactment, its descriptions, and the movement qualities that can be attributed to it. This demonstrates how 'Parkinson Phrase' serves as a Lacanian *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*: it not only comprises the sum of all the characteristics of the movement, but also includes what the verbal descriptions cannot grasp and thus remains missing on the level of representation.

# De-interpreting Psychoanalysis

The idea that specific terms, labels, or names can function as placeholders can be linked to Lacan's theory of the signifier. In *Less than Nothing*, Slavoj Žižek describes the situation of someone wanting to explain a term X to someone who does not know it at all. Synonyms and paraphrases can help, but in the end we often have to say:

'In short, it is X!' Far from functioning as a simple admission of failure, however, this can effectively generate an insight – *if*, that is, through our failed paraphrases we have successfully circumscribed the *place* of the term to be explained. At this point, as Lacan would have put it, 'the signifier falls into the signified', the term becomes part of its own definition (Žižek 2012: 537).

But in what way can the signifier enter the signified? Lacan's answer to this question would be: 'in a form which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality' (Lacan 2006: 417). To understand this somewhat enigmatic statement, it is important to bear in mind that, according to Lacan, language is not something that subjects can simply use as a tool or 'organon'. In his view, subjects do not have sovereign control over the realm of speech. Instead, Lacan's theory of language grants autonomy to the chain of signifiers, which has specific repercussions for the production of meaning. As Alenka Zupančič explains, the chain of signifiers:

constantly produces, from within itself, quite unexpected effects of meaning, a meaning which is, strictly speaking, a surplus meaning that stains the signifiers from within. This is the locus of the

subject (of the unconscious). And it is precisely through this surplus meaning (bound up with surplus-enjoyment) that signifiers are irreducibly and intrinsically bound to the reality to which they refer; it is in this way that they 'enter the signified'. (Zupančič 2017: 61-62)

Following Zupančič, we can understand this surplus meaning as the reverse side of the constitutive negativity (or the missing signifier) that, as explained earlier, inscribes itself as absence in the signifying presence. The signifier enters the signified in the form of this surplus, that is, through the quasi-autonomous production of surplus meaning/enjoyment that ties the signifier to reality, creating as well as complicating the signifying relations.

The Lacanian complication with regard to signifying relations also challenges the assumption that psychoanalytic theory is linked to an 'over-emphasis on interpretation and the construction of meaning' (Cull 2009: 8). To the extent that the chain of signifiers produces meaning effects out of its autonomous movement, it is exactly this continuous movement that impedes full consistency in meaning. As Lacan points out, 'it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but [...] none of the chain's elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment' (2006: 419). William Forsythe's *Sider* is a telling example of how meaning effects, which may be unexpected but nonetheless hoped for, play a role in the creative process without effectively establishing a consistent level of meaning. As dramaturg Freya Vass-Rhee observes, the actual performance of *Sider* 'remains obscure, leaving its audience, like Hamlet, not knowing what to do in an interpretive sense' (2019: 471).

With respect to the question of interpretation, the specificity of psychoanalysis should not be disregarded either. According to Žižek, for Lacan 'psychoanalysis is not hermeneutics, especially not a deep form' (2012: 697). Rather, as Zupančič argues:

Psychoanalysis starts as an interpretation of symptoms. Yet, insofar as these symptoms are themselves already an interpretation, connection, synthesis of different elements, the work of analysis is actually the work of de-interpretation (Zupančič 2008: 36).

Looking at dance through the lens of psychoanalysis does not — or at least not necessarily — imply that one needs to go searching for meaning or interpretable symbols in the manifold activities of bodies, or neither to impose a rigid interpretative framework on them. If we follow Zupančič's claim that psychoanalysis is ultimately about 'de-interpretation' and the dissolution of a coherent narrative by means of free association, it might well invite us to embrace those situations in which we are at a loss for straightforward interpretation.

## Conclusion: There's No Such Thing as a Knowing Subject

There is no doubt that language can be restrictive and that it sometimes does operate in the service of a hegemonic, normative order. However, equating what Lacan means by 'language' with the confinement of subjectivity would be short-sighted. Throughout this article it should have become clear that 'language' for Lacan is not a coherent system, neither does he use the word 'language' in the way we are used to. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges of Lacan's thinking is that he frequently uses terms in an unusual sense while also the meaning of certain key concepts keeps shifting as he never tired of revising them himself. In this respect, one sometimes needs to read Lacan against Lacan and trace the continual reconfiguration of his terminology (preferably with

an eye on the French original) in order to get a better grasp of the assumptions informing his writings and the transcripts of his seminars. My own endeavour in this article has consisted of offering a refined account of Lacan's understanding of language in order to foreground it as a potentially useful framework for examining the role of language in processes of dance making. Lacanian psychoanalysis offers a notion of 'language' that tries to cope with the gap of a signifier gone missing, which in turn is constitutive of the symbolic order. In this respect, I have pointed to the inscribed (and destabilising) inconsistencies in the realm of the symbolic, as well as to the gaps and malfunctions in what Lacan conceives of as language. For both, I have stressed their 'productive' functions, specifically with regard to the discussed examples from dance creation processes.

It is important to emphasise that 'returning' to Lacan and to a stronger focus on 'language' is not about restoring a sovereign, self-conscious subject and its knowledge paradigms. The subject of psychoanalysis is not a knowing, conscious, self-identical, sovereign, 'humanist' subject, accessing and mastering the world by means of 'language'. Lacan declares such an idea of the subject to be fiction:

It's only speaking bodies, as I said, that come up with an idea of the world as such. The world, the world of being, full of knowledge, is but a dream, a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there's no such thing as a knowing subject (*il n'y a pas de sujet connaissant*).  
(Lacan 1999: 126).

I further suggest that looking at dance and the role of language in choreographic processes from the proposed perspective does not necessarily mean that the body remains out of sight or that it disregards the inherent potential of what a body can do. For Lacanian psychoanalysis, the body is not outside of language nor is language without body.

As the examples I have discussed demonstrate, the verbally defined rules that emerge during the creative process, the tasks, the terms for depicting concepts, the probing speech that searches for words — these can all be understood as the Other of the body. This is insofar as they are differential articulations that introduce an alterity and challenge any conceptions of the body as a self-contained entity. Conversely, insofar as these linguistic interventions depend on and inform the body, they show how the symbolic order is not merely the realm of speech and representation, but equally a matter of the body, embodiment, and affects. Based on these considerations, I suggest that a Lacanian perspective can provide an interesting counterweight to the influential prominence of Deleuzian philosophy in current dance and performance studies, precisely because it allows for a greater focus on the use and role of verbal as well as written language in dance making as well as its documentation. Perhaps contrary to common assumptions, returning to Lacan and paying close attention to the intricacies of his thinking provides us with a notion of language that does not fall prey to the construction of meaning and refuses to subordinate moving bodies to representational notions of thought.

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