

OUT-SCORE/IN-SCORE WORKSHOP

Teaching Artistic Agency in Contemporary Choreographic Practices

by Jeanine Durning and Liz Waterhouse

INTRODUCTION

This article is a chronological account of our process facilitating a co-led workshop on choreographic scores for the third German Dance Education Biennale¹ held March 8–11, 2012, in Frankfurt am Main. Derived from our respective experiences working with the research platform Motion Bank² and choreographers Deborah Hay and William Forsythe, this co-taught workshop addressed how scored proposals (as scripts, prompts, objects, and maps) couple with choreographic direction (spoken, read, real-time, and/or remembered) to generate performance.

Our dialogue in relation to this workshop began in July 2011 and is still ongoing, most recently focusing on the publication of the students' in-class documentation.³ We are grateful that the editors of the Biennale book, *pARTnering documentation*, have agreed to let us revise our article for the readers of *Contact Quarterly*.⁴ In doing so, we have edited the documentation to focus on the work-shop content, underscoring the angle of artistic agency.

AGENCY & RESPONSIBILITY

We are particularly interested in how the performer is an agent of choreography, especially when we start to re/consider that (at least in the work of Bill and Deborah) choreography is no longer a set of predetermined movements (or steps) in a sequence. For us, the performer's participation is an engagement (or responsibility) in thinking and perceiving choreographically. From our initial discussions, it was apparent that this workshop would provide a comparative realm to examine Deborah and Bill's choreographic practices, necessitating revision of the standardized ways and language for speaking about



photo © Anja Beier

Workshop participant Annika Wanger in front of the “What if choreography is...?” wall documentation for the Out-Score/In-Score Workshop, March 10, 2012, Frankfurt, Germany.

and teaching dance. We also wanted the workshop to address the unique artistic agency that *dancers* exert in both choreographic realms.

In our initial correspondence, we were facing many questions. One essential and fundamental question was: When we speak of choreography, what are we speaking of—the process, the outcome of a process, the score that is performed, the translation of a score by the performer, and/or the performative event itself? We used this question as a litmus test, to make sure that our teaching methodology addressed the multiple modes and tools of contemporary choreographic thinking and perception.⁵

As a workshop leader, it is a fine balance to weave respect for a choreographer's specific language and repertoire while honoring one's own agency as an artist. With Out-Score/In-Score, we chose comparative practice as a teaching strategy to destabilize choreographic authority and invite the participants' own positioning within a spectrum of ideas and working methods. In doing so, we hoped that the students would feel (or find) their own sense of responsibility and artistic agency.

10th March 2012

* What if I'm a part of a space which can be seen by others? what if I, as a part of the space can give influence to others who are related to the space?

In-class score by workshop participant Da Soul Chung on Day 3 of the Out-Score/In-Score Workshop, March 10, 2012.

* I speak or perform without sound. It is a very loud dialogue with someone I'm not closely related. I perceive the sound and where the sound goes in the space

■ DAY 1

11:45AM → | Introductions

We begin the workshop with a round of introductions, asking everyone to discuss their relationship to score-making, dance, and choreography. Most participants speak with ease about their roles as dancers, but many were apprehensive—if not excited—when speaking about choreography. For many, making choreography is associated with freedom and possibility, where one can exercise his or her artistic priorities, ideas, and choices; but for others, the notion of having too much freedom or “not-knowing” is a source of anxiety and tension. This in-depth and spirited discussion was a powerful impetus for us as facilitators.

12:45PM → | Orientation

To orient the participants, we briefly outline some important decisions we have made about the workshop. First, our use of the repertory of William Forsythe's *Sider*⁶ (2011) and Deborah Hay's *No Time to Fly*⁷ (2010) as points of departure—meaning we will focus more on the process/practices of creation and not on reproducing or teaching the pieces. Second, our choice to engage in comparative methodology and our expectation of real-time negotiation (with them) of what this will produce. Lastly, we frame the workshop theme: the topic of choreographic scores. We emphasize that our focus is to consider this topic from the point of view of the performer. This develops into a more in-depth comparative introduction, juggling the terms “choreography” and “performance” in anticipation of an upcoming wrestle with “score.”

We propose that in Deborah Hay's work, performance requires “training oneself in a questioning process.” The choreography is the dancer's ongoing perception of a set of questions (proposed by Deborah) unfolding while dancing. In William Forsythe's work, performance requires entrainment to an ensemble of objects, architectures, and dancers. The choreography is the dancers' ongoing negotiation of a set of tasks (proposed by Bill) unfolding in the dance environment. In both cases, there

is an interest in choreography as a perceptual activity (and choreographic scores as tools) that can help to uproot habitual or learned ways of moving. One question we have is the habituation of that uprooting in each of our respective lineages.

2:30PM → | Liz | Making Maps

I begin with a caveat: Sider *has no score*. Rather, there are many *score-like things*: an official written script, a book, a sound score, material objects that afford movement, and the dancers' multiple maps. In the workshop, we will consider two elements from this array: maps and boards.

Inspired by Deborah Hay's score *No Time to Fly*, I have chosen to create scores (as handouts) to initiate the process of making maps. Each handout begins with information about the context, conversations, and mood in the studio during the first week of making *Sider*. Below this are instructions that I have written after studying the archives of rehearsal videos, interweaving paraphrased quotes from Bill and the dancers' conversations, as well as the rehearsal assistants' notes. I take responsibility to acknowledge to the participants the multiple ideas that I have poached and the real intertwining of authorship. By admitting that these scores are my initiative within Bill's initiative, I reflect or model the real artistic agency of dancers within this choreographic process.

I invite the workshop participants to begin their own work using the materials provided for them: paper, trace paper, pencils, and erasers. The directions on the second handout are as follows:

- Start. Draw a three-dimensional sphere or globe.
- Map the words (from handout #1, e.g., CONCEPT TOWEL, SIR REAL, PLACEBO GENES, SWISS ATTACHMENT) onto this spherical model of space. Said another way, place the terms on the globe where you think they live.
- Draw relations between terms and features of place.
- If you see something that belongs in your map in another place, move it.
- Create layers.

→

4PM → | Jeanine | What if...

For every choreography of Deborah's, there is a set of "self-perpetuating questions" that the dancer engages with in relation to a written score or sequence of events.⁸ The choreography itself is developed through the ongoing practice of the same set of questions over time. The questions are there to help guide the dancer to uproot habitual or learned behaviors of moving and to keep the relationship to herself, the audience, space, time—and the combination of these experiences—unfixed, refreshed, and present while dancing. Without the practice of these questions (and over time), the execution of the written score (the "choreography" as such) doesn't constitute what Deborah would call her choreography. In Deborah's work, the choreography *is* the dancer's ongoing and shifting *perception* of these questions in relation to a series of poetic directives and images while dancing.

We begin with a simple practice of two questions from the solo score *No Time to Fly*:

What if dance is how I practice my relationship with my whole body at once in relationship to the space where I am dancing in relationship to each passing moment in relationship to my audience?

What if how I see while I am dancing is a means by which movement arises without looking for it?

■ DAY 2

We begin the day with a discussion. The inevitable question comes up: What is a choreography? As opposed to answering that question with a fixed definition, we open it up into another question: What else can a choreography be? Then, *What if choreography is...?*

12PM → | Liz | More Maps

We continue with the map-making process—creating more maps from existing maps. After a concentrated period of work, students receive a new written score with directions:

Each map is trying to figure out how to talk to you; you have to figure out how to let it. The maps are a way of making space meaningful on some level. They are templates for action. What tactics could you use? Invent a way of letting the map pull you through the room, or a mode of navigation.

Rather than convey mapping as a process of knowing what to do and what decisions to make, I am interested in initiating a process or environment of searching. The practice becomes an investigation of what work can be. What if it is a way to do it, not *the* way to do it? What if you are not failing or succeeding?

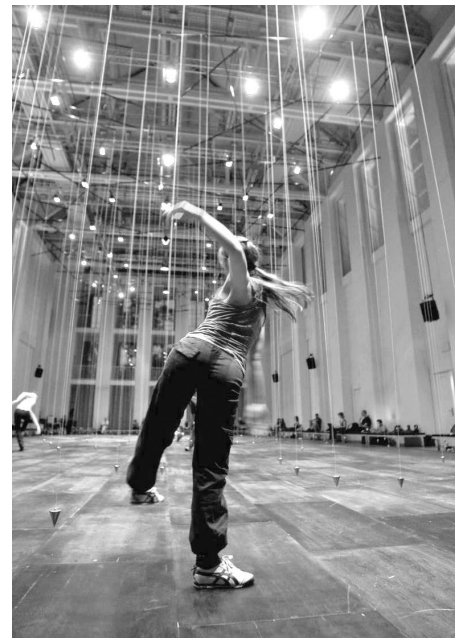


photo © Sylvio Dittrich

2:30PM → | Jeanine | What if... continues

I propose an open space for the participants' self-regulated practice of the *What if...* questions from yesterday. After this practice, I ask the participants to create one or two *What if...* questions of their own based on their own observations of tools relevant to them while dancing and to practice their *What if...* questions.

Next we consider the transmittable power of language: *In partners, transmit your question/s to another. Have your partner practice those questions while you witness them.*

*What was visible in your questions in someone else?
What wasn't visible that you expected would be or wanted to be?
How would you reformulate your questions—or would you add questions—to get closer to the latter?*

Rather than teaching the way in which Deborah works as a choreographic repertory or practice with absolute principles, I am interested in using the way in which Deborah works as an entry point into one perspective of performance making—a set of tools, transmitted through language, that can continuously alter the performer's perception of what he or she is doing. This is not about a fixed choreographic entity but rather an insight into a specific way of working with multiple possibilities and outcomes.

5PM → | Discussion & Documentation

For the Biennale, all facilitators were asked to create documentation of their workshops. The question arises for us how we will properly document our workshop. In alignment with our in-class negotiation with the participants, we put this question out to them.

In the spirit of Deborah's *What if...* practice questions, we agree to respond to the question: *What if choreography is...?*

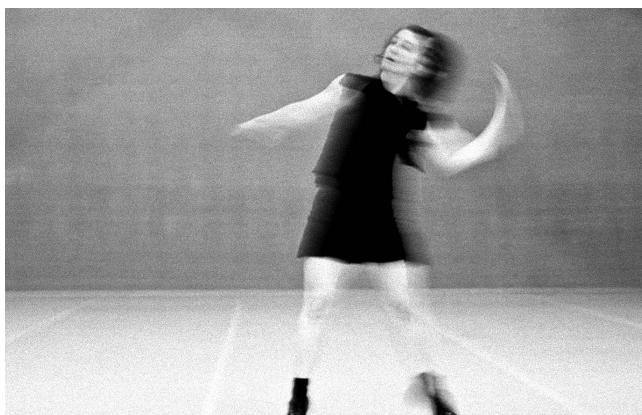


photo © Amin Weber

[Left] Jeanine Durning performing Deborah Hay's *No Time to Fly* at the Frankfurt Lab in October 2011.

[Opposite page] Liz Waterhouse performing William Forsythe's *Nowhere and Everywhere at the Same Time* at the Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden, September 2009.

in writing. Over the next few days, the anonymous written responses collect as a documentation of handwritten notes posted on the studio wall.

■ DAY 3

11:45AM → | Perception

We realize that we are using the term *perception* often in conversation, and that we need to build common language and references for discussing what perception is. In preparation for the day's activities, we introduce the term *affordance* from James Gibson's *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*.⁹ Gibson writes, the "verb *to afford* is found in the dictionary, but the noun *affordance* is not. I have made it up. I mean by it something that refers to both the environment and the animal in a way no existing term does" (127). This means that "to perceive the world is to coperceive oneself" (141).

Liz proposes the following definition of affordance: *neither the real properties of a living subject or material object, but the relationship between how qualities of objects and/or environments are perceived relative to the subject's potential for movement.*

This definition invites experiencing to think through/grasp.

12:30PM → | Liz | Boards

The participants are given boards from *Sider*: sturdy, 6.6' x 3.3' rectangular cardboard. Improvisation becomes a means to examine perception. The question at hand is how an object may or may not be a "scored-affordance" for action. My voiced directions (as questions) include:

How do you hear, see, smell, (not taste), and touch the boards? How does your movement relate to these sensations? What is your relationship to the objects in this room, in this environment, with these people? What movement do the boards afford you?

The students attend to this first with boards, then without boards (engaging with their memory and imagination of

boarding), and lastly adding the option to perform one's map in the space with a real or imagined board. I interrupt the action in the room with a request:

Stop. What just happened? Imagine you were asked to reproduce this state. How would you name it? Write down how you would direct yourself or someone else to perform this.

2:30PM → | Jeanine | Impossible Possibilities

If in Bill's work objects are one of the tools to practice perception, then in Deborah's work the questions and the written score are the tools to practice perception.

How can we use scores to activate perception? Or how can we use scores to put into active questioning how we perceive? Especially, how do we question as performers our perception of self, space, time, and others?

In her coaching or in her written scores, Deborah will often incorporate what I call "impossible possibilities." They are like koans, something that cannot be achieved but is activated through an ongoing perception of what it could be. These "impossible possibilities" act as an alert tracker, something that keeps the performer present and attending to many things at once, so as not to get fixed on an idea or in an action with known consequence.

We then create new scores featuring directives and questions:

Write down one or two directives that propose: an impossible possibility, images, spatial intention or suggestion, relationship to audience and/or other, an opening to time as a tool, and possibility of action.

In addition, create one or two questions to help guide the performer in remaining alert to things other than the directives you propose.

Again working with partners, we enact these new scores. Afterwards, these texts are taped to the wall beside the growing responses to the question *What if choreography is...?*

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Students working with the boards from The Forsythe Company's *Sider* on Day 3 of the Out-Score/In-Score Workshop, March 10, 2012, Frankfurt, Germany.

■ DAY 4

We begin by inviting the participants to self-direct their relationship to all the working methods that have been proposed so far by activating, reading, discussing, going over notes, writing, etc. After this we reassemble to discuss a different way of working.

11AM →| Out-Score/In-Score

The directions for working are as follows:

Make a Score: Working in groups, and using any of the given methods already proposed and practiced and/or any invented, collectively make a score. The score is for the performer(s) to be performed for an audience. Each person comes to the group with one idea, task, tool, material, or question. The score should be written/drawn/notated on a piece of white paper. Attend to possibilities for staging, context, and configuration of audience.

Perform the Score: Each group passes on their score to another group. Then the scores are realized. Not everyone has to enact the score.

Observe Others in Scored Performance: What was visible in your score as enacted by someone else? What was invisible that you expected or wanted to be visible? How would you reformulate your score to get the latter?

12:30PM →| Discussion and Documentation

At this moment, the interrelation of choreography and scores to performance *before an audience* becomes important. We discuss, at length, the role of the spectator and how scores are socially situated within the paradigm of spectator and performer.

Questions that came up:

How to read a score? How do the parts come together?

What are the guiding principles that hold the practice of the score together?

What is visible in a score to the audience? What is visible in a score to the readers/performers?

CONTINUED REFLECTIONS

Through the ongoing questioning with the workshop participants of Out-Score/In-Score, we were hopefully reflecting our own critical inquiry as practitioners *and* reflecting the creative practices of Bill and Deborah's work: what more can choreography do, what more can choreography be, what else can choreography look like?

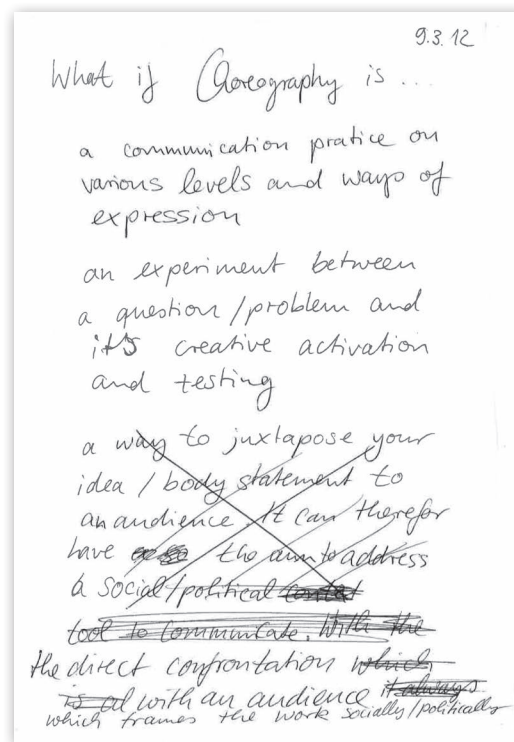
Some interesting reflections resulted from our comparative practice. For example, Deborah has described her practice as one of "dis-attaching"—an active letting go. Performance serves as a practice to "counter-choreograph" what the body has learned. Bill's work, while also disrupting learned patterns, invites "starting from any point": a release of the dancer's technical mastery in an examination of how movement courses through bodies. With this, Bill/the dancers try out what approaches to work and thinking procedures create potential for action. Deborah opens through *What if?* Bill through *Why not!*

For the students, it appeared that the workshop produced a general feeling that a questioning process can be a generative process when making work, which can then have a direct effect on choreographic methodologies/structures and score-making. In this way, over the course of the workshop there was a significant shift in the approach to the types of questions that were being asked.

Rather than the pull of the standards of taking or making the “right” decisions, there was more engagement (or openness) with possibility.

Throughout the workshop, we invited the participants to continually question, in relationship to contemporary choreographic practices, the conventional hierarchy of choreographer to dancer, and to re/consider the dancer’s role as one of artistic agency and choreographic thinking, not only in the process of creating work but in the unfolding of live performance as well.

As teachers, what was particularly engaging was our desire to go back to initial assumptions about teaching methodologies that would otherwise have been taken for granted. We asked: How is dance education configured around the “choreographic” work and the person (or apparatus) that is the choreographer?¹⁰ What is the effectiveness of familiar teaching strategies to address the teaching of philosophies leading to contemporary choreographies? In what cases can choreographic thinking generate new teaching practices, methods, environments, and situations? For us, it seemed impossible to discuss scores without a model of choreography, and a model of choreography is completely tied to a philosophy of movement and the self. The comparison and also intersection of these philosophies led us through destabilization and many generative questions.



In-class “What if choreography is...?” response by workshop participant Johanne Timm on March 9, 2012.

To contact the authors:

Jeanine Durning, jeaninedurning@gmail.com,
www.jeaninedurning.com;
Liz Waterhouse, liz.waterhouse@gmail.com,
www.dancelikething.org.

ENDNOTES

¹The German Dance Education Biennale is a biannual meeting of the diverse dance programs in Germany. Artistic presentations, lectures, workshops, and professional trainings enable exchange about dance, choreography, and education.

²Motion Bank (2010–2013) is a choreographic research project of The Forsythe Company, focusing on the creation of online digital scores.

³Jeanine Durning and Elizabeth Waterhouse, “77 choreographic proposals: Documentation of the evolving mobilization of the term choreography,” *International Journal of Performance Arts & Digital Media*, Volume 9, Issue 1, (1 May 2013): pp. 44–51.

⁴This text was originally published under the title “Questions and Scores: Reflections on the Process of Teaching Out-Score/ In-Score,” in *pARTnering documentation*, ed. Edith Boxberger and Gabriele Wittmann (Munich: Epodium, 2013), 74–83. We kindly thank the publisher for the rights to use it.

⁵We admit to writing “thinking and perception” here casually. In the workshop, we addressed the complexity of how thinking and perception interact, exclude, and co-support.

⁶*Sider* is a work by William Forsythe and The Forsythe Company that premiered on June 16, 2011, in Festspielhaus Hellerau, Dresden.

⁷*No Time to Fly* is a solo work by Deborah Hay, premiered by Deborah Hay at Danspace Project, NYC, March 26, 2010.

⁸Deborah uses the term “self-perpetuating” to indicate the work it takes to continually ask oneself these questions while dancing, rather than determining the questions’ answers or outcomes before dancing.

⁹James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1979).

¹⁰With the word “apparatus,” we wish to acknowledge that a choreographer may work via a distribution or network of people (performers, assistants, technicians) and an array of tools (such as a camera) to produce a new work. In the spectrum of working frequently alone (like Deborah) or almost always in an ensemble (like Bill), scores are an in-fold to introduce creativity within that apparatus or process.