

SECOND EDITION

PINA BAUSCH

ROYD CLIMENHAGA

Routledge

This new, updated edition gives an unprecedented access to Pina Bausch's work and thought. Fully updated and illustrated guide to her dance theatre.

- explores Pina Bausch's work and methods by combining interviews, first-hand accounts, and practical exercises from her method for students of both dance and theatre.
- offers new and exciting insight into the theatrical approach of a unique theatre practitioner, as the first English language overview of her work.
- is an essential introduction to the life and work of one of the most significant choreographers/directors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

As a result of its much acclaim and understanding, and as an initial exploration to the subject, it is highly recommended for today's student.

Royd Climenhaga currently teaches at Eugene Lang College/The New School University in New York City, and is the editor of *The Pina Bausch Sourcebook: The Making of Tanztheater*.

Routledge Performance Practitioners
Series editor: Franc Chambellain

THEATRE & PERFORMANCE STUDIES

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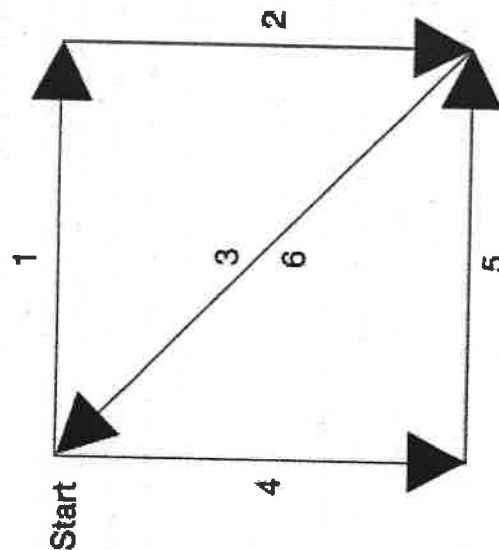
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ROUTLEDGE

Exercise 1: Grid Work

- Set up a square on stage, with each corner a comfortable eight paces apart. Divide the entire group into four roughly equivalent smaller groups and have each group start at each corner of the grid. I find it helpful to work with music with a strong four-beat rhythm to start. The first set of four performers each set out from the four corners and enter the grid, walking in time to the music along the following pathway: 1. Across, 2. Down, 3. Diagonally back, 4. Down the other side, 5. Across, and 6. Diagonally back again.
- Each leg of the journey should take eight paces, and it is more important to maintain the eight-pace structure than to hit the exact points on the grid. Obviously, the diagonal leg is longer, and performers should adapt their steps to fit the greater distance. For people starting at alternate corners, merely rotate the diagram so that the starting point corresponds to their starting corner. In all cases, the pattern remains: over, down, diagonally back, and then mirror that on the other side. The walk should be simple and straightforward along the given pathways. Make sure that performers stay on the beat and the basic structure is maintained.

Establishing this basic pattern gives the performers an incredibly useful structure to help build awareness and response in space and time.



The parameters are versatile enough to allow for response, but limited enough to keep people focused. Once everyone is comfortable with the basic structure, you can add in other parameters.

Exercise 1A: Continued Grid Work

- Once that basic structure is established, people can enter or exit into the space on their own, but always beginning at the start and leaving at the end of an eight count. Performers need to stay focused on what the active space needs, entering when the space demands and leaving when it feels appropriate. Simply being aware of the dynamic of the group within creates an alive tension in the performance space.
- Keep the walk simple and begin to notice other people in the space, someone whom you walk with, or walk parallel to for a time. The center becomes a meeting point that you have to negotiate in order to keep to your path. Let relationships develop as you feel the dynamic tension that is created at individual moments, but simply through a look or facial expression. Try to let the constrictions of the space itself create interactive possibilities rather than trying to force something to happen.

Giving performers a structure with limited variables opens them up to be able to respond to the subtlety of actual conditions in space and time. The goal is to create an open structure of awareness that allows for possibilities to develop as variables are added. Response comes from the conditions present in the active performance space and performers stay connected to that active potential even as they are outside of the arena.

Exercise 1B: Felt Response

- Once that basic awareness is in place, performers can adjust their walk based on felt response. Stay in time to the music, but you could walk double time or half time, or with small syncopations to move about the space. Be careful that it doesn't just become juking to the music, but that your walks come from and feed back into the dynamic of the group. Take time to stay outside the square to see what develops inside the performance space. Feel when it is appropriate to enter back in to the performance.

By using an exercise like this grid work to develop response on stage, performance presence shifts from the attempt to create a language of expression directed out to an audience to creating an arena of action that asks an audience in. That was a condition of performance I had responded to in seeing both theater and dance, but analyzing Bausch's work gave me the means to understand how to achieve it. Performers in Bausch's pieces create stage images, but they are always engaged in the present and open that response to an audience. Rather than creating a present moment out of a constructed time and space, they are present more immediately (and usually bodily).

The basic grid structure provides the resources to explore this dynamic and build awareness within it. You can also work more specifically with space or time and bring the performers' growing awareness of the way they exist in time and space back to the grid as you add more and more parameters.

Exercise 2: Relationship in Space

- Working in groups of three to start, and expanding to five or more (odd numbers help to mix up the group and prevent people from partnering up, losing touch with the overall stage dynamic), have the performers simply spread out in space. Imagine the air between you as a fluid substance and any movement toward or away compresses or expands the space between you. Start with simple movements of the body concentrating on the space between individual performers.
- As the performers become attuned to the spatial tensions between people, allow actions to become broader, moving away or coming toward each other. Give yourself the chance to respond and once you make a move, give your partners a chance to react to the new dynamic within the group. Once you are comfortable with the dynamics of changing relationships in space through this active awareness of the space between you, you can work within the system, moving more fluidly and forcefully to alter conditions and react in time. Bring this awareness back to the grid to help develop response out of spatial dynamics.

Exercise 3: Relationship in Time

- Again working with three people to start and expanding as the group gets comfortable with response in time, have the performers simply walk about the space in straight lines, changing directions when they encounter someone else

in the space. On a clap from outside the performance area, the performers all stop, and on another clap, they begin walking again. Stay attuned to the dynamics of the group in these moments of stillness and then as the walking begins again. Ask the performers to work to find those moments of stillness on their own, stopping and starting based on felt response among the group.

- Once the group is able to achieve this felt response in time, find ways to include it in different combinations, so that one person stopping may be connected to another while a third keeps moving, or one person simply stops amidst the activity of the rest of the group. Play with the different dynamics, keeping focus on how they alter the fluid relationships that are developed in the group. Add time and stillness into the elements of response in the grid.

The Viewpoints – created by Mary Overlie out of roots in dance practice and further developed by Anne Bogart, Tina Landau, and SITI Company – provide a thorough means of exploring and utilizing spatial and temporal awareness in performance. Bogart and Landau expand on the original viewpoints established by Overlie to include four distinct viewpoints of time (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition) and five viewpoints of space (shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography). Performers work to keep an open awareness of their individual action, their connection to others, and the overall group dynamic along these parameters of space and time. Training in Viewpoints can provide a more thorough structure for engaging performance presence in dance or theater (or combinations therein), but even these simple exercises can help to open up awareness and begin work from a base in real experience.

Once performers are comfortable with the grid structure, you can add more and more parameters, including more challenging music. Ask the performers to allow the music to enter in to their response without dictating action. Both varying and more complicated rhythmic structures, and stories within music can provide conditions of response guided by music. Bausch explores all manner of music in her rehearsal process, with an eye not simply to the feeling of the music, but to the cultural weight a particular song may have, and the ways in which performers can work with and against the music to achieve different effects. The structure of the grid provides a means to experiment with how different music creates different conditions on stage.

RELATIONSHIP TO AUDIENCE

Much of Bausch's work explores a direct connection to the audience. Even through the opening confrontational stare in a piece like *Kontakthof*, the barrier between the supposedly anonymous audience sitting in the dark and the created world of the stage in which we are asked to invest is broken. Just as we are made aware of the reality of the performed space itself, we are also often made aware of our role in the event, even if it is merely as witness or voyeur to what is put in front of us. Exercises are designed to open performer response

Set out chairs:

Exercise 4: Presence

► This exercise is best performed in a large space, preferably a theater with a specifically designated audience area. Have a group of performers line up all the way upstage facing the back wall, their backs to the audience. Using peripheral awareness, walk backwards in unison at a slow pace and gradually lifting your arms and finally extending through your body to go up on your toes throughout the walk. Using the spatial awareness developed in the previous exercise, focus on the condensing space between you as a unit and the audience. Let that energy be what buoys your arms up as you move toward the other side of the stage. By the time you reach the opposite edge of the stage you should have arrived at the full height of your extension. (Have a prompter help to ensure they don't fall off the edge of the stage.)

► As you stop, turn in unison, still on your toes and with arms raised above your head. Lower your heels to the floor and gradually lower your arms while looking directly out at the audience. Imagine the activated space between yourself and the audience and maintain that awareness as you now take the directed energy and bring it to a spatial or time exercise like the ones listed above.

The audience becomes another factor in the performers' structure of awareness, and continued work with exercises like this can help them to fill that space between the audience and the performance. The invisible boundary between the audience and the performance is permeated, allowing for a more direct communication between spectator and event.

Exercise 5: Interaction

► Two performers stand at a distance from each other and maintain eye contact. They work to feel the space between them, moving back and forth exploring the dynamic tension of space. Once a connection is made, one performer simply assumes a posture and facial expression expressing a specific emotion, trying to radiate that feeling across the space to his or her partner. Anger and defiance are easier to achieve than love or tenderness, but work with a variety of emotions switching back and forth to get a sense of what carries.

► Next have one person enter the performance space and assume a similar emotional stance, this time trying to express that connection to an audience. Remember, it's not charades, so the challenge is to create a dynamic connection based simply on activating the space, rather than doing something that the audience may get. After the first person has assumed a dynamic emotional stance, others join him or her so that the group gradually grows, all working to achieve that dynamic connection with the audience.

Conventional acting exercises often work with various means of maintaining a charged presence between performers, but it is generally something looked in on by an audience, and dancers work in partners and groups to create relationships among themselves and in space and time, but they are often closed off to an audience. Methods like Contact Improv are wholly centered on creating an intimacy of connection between performers as a private act, wholly separate from an audience. A Bausch performance opens up that relationship between performer and audience in any number of ways. Sometimes, they literally break the bounds of the stage/audience divide: serving tea to the audience, coming down to the front row of the audience to share family photos, or even instructing the entire audience in a gesture sequence that leads us to hug each other. But outside of these overt interactions lies a more implicit direct relationship with the audience in the way in which we are included in the space and time of the performed moment and the way in which that boundary is continually transgressed.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Bausch's performance practice is created with fundamental building blocks that rely on the actual people engaged in the event, even as they

construct a performing persona. Those individuals work through their own experience to develop theatrical images and movement/ physical constructions. To build on that individual base, Bausch asks questions and gives her performers the freedom to respond in different ways: through words, a performed image, or a movement phrase. Each response comes from the individuals themselves, and draws on their own skills and abilities, history, and experience.

ASKING QUESTIONS

As we saw in Chapter 2, Bausch has always stated that the shift she made from technique-based rehearsal processes to more open-ended explorations came through asking questions. The questions may lead to stories from the performers or performed moments, but in either case what Bausch concentrates on, and what leads to usable material for performance, is the performers' connection to the prompt. The questions Bausch poses are aimed at the central feeling or idea that stands as the base of the developmental process for each piece, but questions often may approach that central focus more obliquely, and in fact, it is often through the process of asking and answering questions in rehearsal that a real underlying current begins to emerge.

In the earlier pieces, Bausch drew more heavily on her performers' own pasts, memories from their childhoods or particular experiences they may have had with love or loss. The residency pieces that Bausch has concentrated on for the last twenty years of her career came with a ready base of the location itself, but once a feeling for the place began to emerge, then the questions might become more pointed and push toward individual experience. In *Nur Du* (1996), for instance, based on the company's residency in the American West, after the ensemble repeatedly discovered images of display and false fronts in their experience of Los Angeles, Bausch pushed them to consider times in their own lives when they were put on display. By concentrating on individual experience, but pushing toward the underlying structure of the feeling that goes with the experience, Bausch begins to create metaphoric images that speak to something more human in us all. The questions may move toward the personal, but because the images

that result work to uncover the base structure of the experience, they become more universal. The moments as performed provide a wedge into the interior landscape of collective experience.

In 1980: *A Piece by Pina Bausch*, a piece primarily about loss and derived at least in part in response to her partner Rolf Borzik's death, Bausch uses clichéd formalities both for their literal value, with the attendant uncomfortableness that often surrounds them, and for their metaphoric relation to the larger theme. At one point a single woman is confronted by a large, tightly packed group. The idea of outsidership is simply and powerfully expressed as the performers stand in silence for a moment and look at the one woman cast out from the collective group. One at a time people leave the group and face the woman directly, offering rather flat recitations of tired departure lines, and then circle around and return to the group:

"Goodbye, and a lot of success."

"It's a pity that you have to go so soon, best regards." "Please don't forget us here, we'll be thinking of you."

"What, you have to go! Oh, stay another five minutes. No? Oh well."

"My dear, what a pity, it's not really time yet is it? Well then, all the best. Bye."

"Bye, shall I see you to the door, and my best regards to your family. Everything's going to be just fine."

"It's so wonderful to have met you. Take care of yourself."

When everyone has offered their farewell, the whole group waves to the woman who remains motionless. The image then dissolves into another. This scene is repeated in the second act exactly as it was performed in the first, except without words.

The cultural construction of goodbyes is examined to find the truth of loss and discomfort implicit in the situation, while simultaneously exposing the artificiality of the scene. The moment is derived from a simple question in rehearsal about a time you said goodbye. The answers, or phrases, the performers come up with in response all appear innocuous enough, but the context in which they are placed in performance makes the feeling of loss palpable. The act of leaving is brought to its metaphoric base and, even if derived from

a particular context within the ensemble, is open to any moment of loss we have experienced.

Exploring something like love can be hugely daunting. Simply asking "What is your experience of love?" may lead to an outpouring of ideas, or just freeze people with the enormity of the potential response. Focusing questions at specific moments of the major idea in question can help to start uncovering the base structure for the experience as it is felt by individual performers. Asking them when they have found themselves in a moment of fear, or a sudden impulse of love, or afraid for their life, helps to activate the response by tying it to direct actions. Once those individual moments are on the table, then you can work to explore those ideas through a series of further questions and tasks to uncover the base structure of the feeling and use that to create stage images. I provide one example here of starting from questioning a direct experience, and then exploring the dimensions of that experience through a variety of means, but any number of prompts can begin the process.

Exercise 6: Getting at the Essence

► Describe a crisis moment in a love relationship. It can be a moment of transition in a romantic relationship, difficulty with a parent, brother, or sister, or simply a flare up in any relationship that is more emotionally intimate. Make sure that the moment you describe is specific.

- 1 Write down the moment you describe and read it to the group.
- 2 Have someone else read your story aloud.
- 3 Working in pairs, imagine yourself in the moment and re-create the physical structure of it; what you actually did in the moment. Switch places and re-create your partner's moment.
- 4 Combine your story with another pair's physical structure and vice versa.

Once you start exploring a simple question like this, you can tear it apart in any number of ways, then put it back together in varying combinations. Try different attitudes in performing the moment, from deadpan to energized. A heightened moment like this reveals the ways in which we are connected to each other, and any given individual's

story begins to uncover deeper structures for how love and intimacy work and how we function in relation to them.

Reconfiguring an experience and presenting it in different form can also work toward uncovering the base structure of an image, opening up what may be a personal experience to a more universal attitude. In *Palermo*, Palermo (1989), Nazareth Palermo strides purposefully on stage with a sheaf of pasta under her arm. She looks directly at the audience and forcefully says: "This is my spaghetti. It's all mine. You can't have any and I won't give you any, it's mine, all mine." Holding up a single piece of pasta, she says: "You see this? Mine. And this? Mine too. I won't give you any, you can't have any. It is mine, all mine." She goes on in this vein for a good minute until her ownership of the pasta is unquestioned. She has endowed it with meaning and purpose. The moment is funny, but there is something desperate about her claims of ownership.

Palermo created this image out of her experience in Palermo and seeing the older women's sense of propriety and fierce loyalty to their own, whether it be family, house, or the town itself. Palermo performs this moment toward the beginning of the piece, and we don't see this "character" again. Once an image is presented, the performers often move on to other images and other "characters" in creating the intricate collage of elements that make up a piece, but much later in the work Dominique Mercy coolly and calmly walks on stage, a sheaf of pasta under his arm. He looks out at the audience with a sly grin, delicately takes a piece of pasta out and breaks it. He does this again and again as he makes his way across the stage, all the while looking directly at us, implicating us in the act. The force of Palermo's ownership of that pasta makes Mercy's act one of extreme violence, and we are included in the act. The image is derived from a simple question of experience brought down to its essence and endowed with special presence and then reconfigured to create a new image that continues and builds on the previous, furthering the web of meaning that the piece creates. Again, I provide one example here for working with this kind of prompt or question, but using different issues leads toward a range of material for performance.

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