Rough Cut: Phenomenological Reflections on Pina Bausch's Choreography

Tanja Staehler
University of Sussex

This essay interprets the work of the German choreographer Pina Bausch with the help of phenomenological examinations by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, and Martin Heidegger. Pina Bausch's choreography not only shares basic themes like the everyday, the body, and moods with phenomenology, but they also yield similar results in overcoming traditional dualist frameworks. Rather than being an instrument for expressing ideas, the body is in constant exchange with the natural elements, exhibiting vulnerability and passivity. Moods, in turn, are neither subjective nor objective; this also holds for longing, an essential constituent of Pina Bausch's work. Dance theater and phenomenology, each in their unique ways, are capable of acknowledging and accommodating the ambiguity of our human existence.

Pina Bausch's piece *Rough Cut* was first performed in 2005; it was inspired by a trip to South Korea.[1] Let me recount a few fragments which occur repeatedly, at various moments of the performance. A woman is carried across the stage by two men. Her legs are walking in the air. Are the two men supporting her movement or preventing it? Are they preventing her from walking in the direction which she herself would have chosen? She is being carried off stage. Another woman in a white dress is running in a circle, running as fast as she can. Is she running away from something or toward something? She runs off stage. A third woman performs a solo dance. Her arms, her legs appear being pulled by some external force. Her body sinks together, gets pulled up. How are we to describe her dance? Expressions like 'abrupt,' 'interrupted,' 'rupture' come to mind. There is an impression of passivity, despite the fact that the performance is very energetic and visibly exhausting.

This essay attempts to show that dance theater can reveal similar results about our existence as yielded by phenomenological investigations. One important point of connection between Pina Bausch's work and phenomenology consists in the themes that are selected, such as the everyday, corporeality, and moods.[2] As a method, phenomenology is represented in this essay by three figures: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and Emmanuel Levinas.

I. Understanding

When Pina Bausch's choreographies were first performed in the 1970's, the audience tended to react with shock and rejection. Not the entire audience, of course; there has always been a group of people who really appreciated her pieces. Yet it was common for performances to be interrupted by whistles or by people getting up to leave the auditorium. When asked about those early years in interviews, Pina Bausch admits that it was difficult, but that she was never inclined to give up (cf. *PBT*, 223). She asserts that she never meant to provoke anybody—an interesting statement because it seems that a part of the audience perceived her choreographies indeed as a (deliberate) provocation. Pina Bausch is not trying something different for the sake of being different, let alone shocking or disturbing.

Nowadays, Pina Bausch's performances no longer yield shock and rejection; this does not mean that everybody appreciates her work. A rather common response of those who do not wish to return to her performances can be phrased as: "I don't understand." The topic of "understanding" Pina Bausch's choreographies shall be a guiding theme for this essay, leading to wider questions like the possibility of understanding dance, and finally, the relation between dance and philosophy. In the course of this essay, it will turn out that Pina Bausch's choreographies accomplish insights into human embodied existence similar to those reached by phenomenological examinations.

How can Pina Bausch's work be understood? I would like to suggest that this is either a mute question in that "understanding" proves to be a wrong approach to her work or else, a new and expanded concept of "understanding" is necessary. The success of this new concept would depend on its ability to endure and accommodate ambiguity. The significance of ambiguity for Pina Bausch's work becomes obvious in a 1995 interview. When a particular scene from *Arien* (*Arias*) is mentioned in which the dancers, wearing party dresses, are standing up to their neck in water, Pina Bausch remarks that there is a saying: "Das Wasser steht mir bis zum Hals" (*PBT*, 232)—"to be in it up to one's neck," or literally from the German, "to be in water up to one's neck." Norbert Servos asks whether this is the idea she meant to embody, and Pina Bausch responds: "It is not meant to be something that unequivocal (*Eindeutiges*)." She elaborates that she is aiming at an openness, and that everything which we "know beforehand" is uninteresting.

When Pina Bausch describes how a member of the audience might come to understand—in a wider sense of understanding—her performance, she talks about an encounter or meeting. When the viewer senses that an encounter has taken place, her aim has been achieved. The notion of encounter is vague but important. Its importance lies in preventing a potential sense of arbitrariness: If Pina Bausch does not want to convey a specific message, if there is no "correct" understanding of a certain scene as sad or happy, and if she does not explain her pieces in interviews or in the program leaflet,[3] the impression might arise that the viewer is encouraged to associate freely and interpret the performance in any way (s)he pleases. Although there are no precise restrictions imposed on the viewer's interpretation, an encounter will only happen if the viewer has an insight which is specifically inspired by the piece. Those who base their interpretation solely on their personal history and for whom such an encounter does not happen are unlikely to be enthusiastic about Pina Bausch's work.[4]

At the same time, the notion of an encounter is vague, and necessarily so. There is not one single correct reading of Pina Bausch's pieces. It is not our task to second-guess the choreographer's intentions; nor is Pina Bausch hiding her interpretation from us. She states that she is "in the lucky position of not having to analyze her pieces" and that the pieces are to fragile to be pressed into an analytic frame.[5] She is afraid of not finding the right words. This fear puts the current essay in a rather precarious position. By no means do I wish to claim that I can find the appropriate words which Pina Bausch herself is lacking. Rather than analyzing her choreography, I shall focus on certain general themes (which are also mentioned in the interviews) that relate dance to phenomenological findings. An "encounter" between Pina Bausch's choreography and phenomenology might become possible in this fashion.

Phenomenology is concerned with an exploration of the everyday; the same holds for Pina Bausch's work. Such an exploration of the everyday does not mean to leave the everyday untouched but rather to reveal its unquestioned presuppositions. An attempt at a description which rids itself of presuppositions necessarily has to begin from the everyday since all other starting points already require previous decisions and justifications.[6] Martin Heidegger states that an exploration of our existence has to start from "average everydayness" (*BT*, 16) as the place where we always already find ourselves. Furthermore, we are the creatures who can ask questions and for whom our existence is a question and a concern.

Phenomenology asks what a question is and what questions are most relevant to us in our existence. Pina Bausch also poses questions to her dancers; she is famous for this kind of procedure. Her questions do not necessarily take the grammatical form of a question (e.g., "making something small" or "a gesture related to helplessness"); but they function as questions since they ask the dancer for a response, be it a dance, a gesture, a movement, or a phrase. The dancers report that the need to be creative and come up with a response is often quite stressful as they feel exposed or put on the spot. In some pieces, this very exposure is set to stage.

Pina Bausch states that "almost anything can be dance." A certain "awareness" is required; it is a matter of the "how" (*PBT*, 225). Approaching the everyday with a different kind of awareness and focusing on the "how" (rather than the "what") sounds like a textbook definition of phenomenology. Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, describes this move to the "how" as a shift in attitude which he calls "reduction"—the suspension of judgment and the focus on modes of givenness. Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that the best formulation for this central element of phenomenological method would be "'wonder' in the face of the world."[7] At the same time, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that "the most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction" (*PP*, xiv) since we cannot completely abandon our familiarity with the world and abandon all presuppositions.

Pina Bausch mentions a form of reduction which is not identical to the phenomenological reduction but yields somewhat similar results. This reduction consists in an isolation or omission: "Everything is omitted" (*PBT*, 224). This statement comes in the context of discussing stage effects and stage decoration, and Pina Bausch says that she uses those only minimally. But there is actually more being omitted; existence is reduced to gestures, episodes, short scenes of interaction. This reduction appears very appropriate, as if existence indeed mainly consisted of such episodes and movements. Through this isolation, we see what usually remains hidden in and by the context. Normally, the single gesture or movement gets hidden in the context, and the context remains hidden behind the gestures and movements. In dance theater, both are disclosed.[8] Such ellipsis or isolation could be called alienation effect, however trite this term appears to be. In light of these methodological remarks, a distinct and very central phenomenon shall be examined: the body.

II. Corporeality

The first and predominant point of connection between phenomenology and Pina Bausch's choreography will naturally be corporeality. It may appear as a commonplace or truism that dance overcomes the mind-body-split or goes beyond Cartesian dualism. Yet in fact, several traditional forms and conceptions of dance consider the dancing body as an instrument of sorts, expressive of certain ideas, and this view is quite compatible with Cartesianism. The impossibility of distilling determined and unequivocal ideas expressed in Pina Bausch's work already indicates that in her choreographies, the body does not serve as an instrument for conveying thoughts. There is not a knowledge which is conveyed through the body but rather, a knowledge that lives in the body, inhabiting it.

Pina Bausch explains that she is concerned with something which we have always already understood, although not by way of the intellect (cf. *PBT*, 224 & 226). This remark adds to a different, expanded sense of understanding by pointing to a form of bodily knowledge. To put it differently, with Maurice Merleau-Ponty, both intellectualism and empiricism fall short of accounting for our embodied existence. At this point, I wish to give a brief and very incomplete[9] history of phenomenological accounts of the body, distinguishing three approaches or phases. After outlining all three phases I will return to Pina Bausch and consider how elements of the three phases can be traced in her work.

The first phase can be read as a response to dualist accounts of the body as distinct from the mind. This first approach is represented primarily by Edmund Husserl's *Ideas II* and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. The predominant question in these texts concerns the special way in which we experience our bodies, particularly how the body is given differently than things are—despite the fact that it still has a thingly dimension. Some of the most important features of the body are its spatiality as an absolute Here from which I cannot distance myself, the capacity for double sensations (e.g., one hand touching the other), and *kinaestheses*, i.e., the close intertwinement of perception (*aisthesis*) and bodily movement (*kinesis*) (cf. *PP*, 90 ff.). This first perspective emphasizes how our body opens us up toward the world in a unique fashion. As such, not only is the body the condition for perceiving a world, but also our existence would be entirely different if we had the body of an insect or an elephant.[10]

Merleau-Ponty explains how neither intellectualism nor empiricism offer satisfying accounts of the body. When I walk stairs, such action does not depend on an intellectual awareness of the factors involved, such as the distance between the steps. Yet it is also not a purely automatic action, based on stimuli and responses, as the empiricist would claim. There is some level of freedom as I can adjust to changes of the situation; at the same time, merely knowing about a changed situation (e.g., a broken step) is not sufficient for successfully adjusting to it. In this spirit, Merleau-Ponty discusses the special role of the "habit body" which keeps certain actions in store, but is also capable of learning and modifying movements.

The second phase strives to overcome the privileging of subjectivity. The most prominent and far-reaching representative is Merleau-Ponty in his late philosophy, especially *The Visible and the Invisible*. However, it becomes difficult at this point to undertake a phenomenology of the body as individuated: Merleau-Ponty stresses that the body is made of the same "flesh" as the world. Rather than attributing a special role to the human subject, he emphasizes the interchange, exchange, or, as he calls it, "reversibility" between me and the world. Drawing from descriptions of painters who state that objects are "looking at them" (*EM*, 167), Merleau-Ponty proposes a new understanding of perception where the objects speak to me, solicit my attention, and even look back.

Such an account poses problems, and interpreters suggest that some expressions in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy should be taken metaphorically since otherwise the distinctions between body, world, and things become blurred.[11] It is certainly important to keep up divisions between human bodies, tools, stones, elements, etc. Yet it is also important to realize that perception is not a one-sided occurrence, but an interaction between me and the world, where I indeed respond to allures from an object. Phenomena such as attention, where the question arises as to why I attend to one object rather than another, can only be understood if the object-side is also included in the description; hence Merleau-Ponty's talk of the "rivalry" of things (*PW*, 52). And this interaction goes far beyond perception. In perception, I still have a fairly clear distance from the object; but there are other, more fundamental levels at which I am immersed in the flesh of the world. When Merleau-Ponty tries to explain what he means by "flesh," he refers to "the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire" (*VI*, 139). The notion of element leads us to the third phase of approaching the body, which will be introduced through Emmanuel Levinas and his emphasis on the vulnerable body.

Levinas states: "*To be a body* is on the one hand *to stand* [*se tenir*], to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the *other*" (*TI*, 164; his italics). This "being in the *other*" signifies my dependence on the elements; yet this dependence does not diminish the enjoyment of my existence, as Levinas points out. Upon closer scrutiny, the inevitable dependence of incarnated beings on the elements reveals that our position is a precarious one indeed. Levinas criticizes the first approach to the body for its emphasis on activity. In it, the body was described as our point of access to the world, as "I can." For Levinas, this emphasis conceals the deep passivity of the body. While it is much more comforting to describe the body as activity and "I can," it has to be admitted that having a body means being vulnerable. I am already exposed to the elements: "nakedness and indigence, exposed to the anonymous exteriority of heat and cold" (*TI*, 175). Levinas calls the body a cross-roads, a point where different movements meet—enjoyment, dwelling, but also nakedness and vulnerability. For Levinas, having a body is essentially connected to ethics. The first two approaches did not sufficiently consider the body's vulnerability, passivity, and ethical involvement. The vulnerability of the Other makes me responsible for him/her. Having a body means that one can kill and be killed; it also means that one can offer support and protection.

Levinas emphasizes that our self-protection is always fragile. Since we depend on something other, we are, on a fundamental level, not active and autonomous, but passive and exposed. Events occur "despite oneself." A strong proof of this "despite oneself" is, on the bodily level, the experience of aging. In *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Levinas maintains that aging is the body's temporality, the mode of time that is peculiar to the body (cf. *OB*, 53). Since temporality, for Levinas, always involves the Other, it is not possible to provide a phenomenological analysis of the body's temporality without taking responsibility (and generativity) into account. The body's temporality points to Eros as well as fecundity.

My enjoyment is exactly the other side of my dependence on the elements, and this dependence testifies to my fragility and vulnerability. Even though the results that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty gained in the first two approaches are valuable, they neglected the deeper passivity of the body that is its vulnerability. Starting from perception, they assumed a certain ethical neutrality of the body. For the late Levinas, it even becomes questionable that I have my body to myself since the Other is already "in my skin," as it were.

With this incomplete history of phenomenological accounts of the body in mind, let us return to Pina Bausch. The first dimension of the body, namely, that the body is distinct from mere things, that we are essentially incarnated beings, and that the body is our "means" of having a world, is present throughout Pina Bausch's work. The essential differences between our bodies and mere things become obvious particularly when a body is presented almost like a thing. In Pina Bausch's performances, dancers often "fall" on stage, in different ways and for different reasons. The falling body is exposed to gravity similarly to an object. A body falling is always an accident of some sort where the body almost behaves like an object, yet is not supposed to simply hit the ground like an object. At the same time, we notice that the body falls differently from an object. It neither falls heavily like a stone nor lightly like a feather; a strange mixture of violence and grace is in the falling body. We may admire the elegance of the movement; yet we hold our breath as we expect the body to hit the floor.

Another example which occurs especially in *Rough Cut* is the body as being carried. Carrying a human body is different from carrying a sack of potatoes. When two male dancers carry a female dancer, her legs move in the air as if she was walking (or cycling). This image creates a strange contrast because the movement of the carried body points exactly to the fact that the lived body is self-moving. As self-moving, the body does not need to be carried, and it is unclear whether the dancers carrying the body are helping or hindering the woman.

The ambivalent character of the body as distinct from mere things, yet also somewhat alike to them becomes obvious in Pina Bausch's pieces even where everyday actions are portrayed. Two means are employed to disclose certain aspects of everyday movements which remain hidden otherwise: repetition and isolation. On an everyday level, movements are only repeated if the purposeful action calls for such repetition (as in household chores, for example). When repeating a movement without such a purpose, we focus on the movement as such and notice aspects which remain hidden otherwise, like the beauty of washing one's hair or the difficulty of putting on a tight dress.[12] Repetition can also occur as multiplication if several dancers perform the same gesture rather than the same movement being repeated by one dancer. Repetition is often combined with isolation or omission which takes the movement out of its context, as it was discussed above.

By way of repetition and isolation, the everyday is brought to the fore: activities like eating, washing, dressing, combing, but also basic movements

like running, walking, sitting, and lying down usually remain embedded and hidden in our daily routines. Even though we spend most of our time occupied by these activities, we do not usually focus on them as such. The everyday body is thus revealed in Pina Bausch's work as distinct from objects and as our unique point of access to the world, engaged in actions which are embedded in various contexts or horizons. Furthermore, it is revealed as affected by the world and its elements—the second approach to the body.

The second approach to corporeality requires an acknowledgement of the interchange and "reversibility" between me and the world. Since Merleau-Ponty explains the "flesh" of the world by referring to the natural elements of which the world is made, the significant role of the elements in Pina Bausch's work appears to be a suitable point of connection. In *Rough Cut*, the four traditional elements play fundamental roles. Earth makes an appearance mostly in the shape of rocks and stones. Stones are distributed on stage, creating obstacles for walking and dancing. Rocks or rather, a mountainscape, constitutes the stage decoration, as it were. Water is present directly in the washing and cleaning activities when water is splashed onto the stage (and subsequently has to be wiped off). It is also present indirectly through swimming movements which the dancers perform at various points, and virtually as it is projected onto the mountainscape. Fire holds an ambivalent position between destruction and creation or danger and beauty. A woman slowly burns colorful flowers, one after the other. A man is holding a lighter close to a woman's heals, thereby prompting her to walk. Air, as an invisible force, comes in the form of breath and wind.

An interplay occurs between the elements and the dancing body. Pina Bausch states that she is interested in the natural elements because of their effects on the body. Water makes the clothes "long and wet," earth sticks to the body when the dancers sweat (cf. *PBT*, 232). While it may first seem that we are exposed to the elements in extreme situations, the performances show that we are just as much in touch with the elements in our everyday life, even though we are rarely aware of it. Levinas's expression "bathing in the elements" is certainly enacted in Pina Bausch's work; there is bathing in the more literal sense, but also sleeping, eating, and many other basic forms of "enjoyment" and dwelling. It becomes obvious that our existence is embedded in and dependent on the elements.

Yet what about vulnerability and passivity which are the decisive mode of the body for Levinas and the most essential aspect of the third approach? It is amazing how the dancers manage to convey passivity through the

dancing body which we expect to be most active. Their bodies appear to be pulled by invisible (and sometimes visible) forces, torn in different directions, sometimes dropped rather violently. It would be possible to show a version of passivity through a rather disengaged, slow and minimal dance; yet Pina Bausch's dancers accomplish the opposite. In a highly engaged dance, they nevertheless convey the sense that bodily movement is not, or at least not entirely, a matter of our spontaneity and free activity. Rather, we are exposed to forces which are beyond our control. Gravity is the most basic and predictable one amongst these.

In addition to being pulled and being exposed to the elements, human vulnerability is also shown through nudity. Nudity in Pina Bausch's pieces is rarely erotic per se. In *Rough Cut*, a woman's naked upper body is covered by her arms which she crosses in front of her breasts. There is a mixture of shame and grace, almost pride, in this gesture as the woman slowly walks across the stage. Our most basic nudity and vulnerability are not a simple matter of shame and hiding, but a much more pervasive condition which we cannot escape by running away or putting on clothes.

Hence all three dimensions of the body which phenomenological examinations reveal also come to the fore in Pina Bausch's work: firstly, the body as different from things which opens me up toward the world; secondly, the body in reversible exchange with the world; and thirdly, the body as passive and vulnerable. This last dimension of the body already points to the second main theme which shall be discussed here, namely, emotionality.

III. Emotionality

Among the few strong affirmative statements made by Pina Bausch about her work is the following proclamation: "In any case, emotionality (*Emotionalität*) is very important" (*PBT*, 235). Another element of her work which she mentions frequently is longing (*Sehnsucht*).[13] I would like to suggest that longing can be read as a mood in the wider sense. After considering Martin Heidegger's ideas for a phenomenology of moods, Pina Bausch's work will be drawn upon to see how longing can qualify as a mood.

It is a common procedure for Heidegger, especially in *Being and Time*, to approach a phenomenon by clarifying misunderstandings in our common understanding, showing how a superficial consideration of the phenomenon gets entangled in contradictions and, therefore, cannot possibly reach deeper dimensions. In the case of moods, those misleading common conceptions

concern the place and emergence of moods as well as the assumption that psychology would be the science best suited to investigate moods.

Usually, we think of moods as something occasional, subjective, and unreliable. We assume that we find ourselves in a mood every so often, e.g., when we are sad or happy. Heidegger emphasizes that Dasein always has a mood, even if this mood is just indifference, and that it is a mistake to merely focus on the extreme cases of moods. The fact that we are always in some mood also makes it easier to understand that we do not first perceive or know something in order to then develop an emotional approach in a second step; only by abstraction can moods be considered something secondary. Instead, we always already "turn toward or turn away" (*BT*, 135).

Regarding the question as to whether moods are merely subjective, Heidegger points out how both extreme possibilities are dissatisfying: A mood is not just dependent on the subject, on my personality and disposition; otherwise, my moods would be much more stable, and I would not experience them as "caused" by a certain object or situation. At the same time, moods are not merely object-dependent either; different people are affected differently by the same object or situation. Heidegger concludes that a mood "comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world" (*BT*, 136).

If an investigation of moods requires an analysis of Being-in-the-world, phenomenology becomes a good candidate for the suitable method. Yet what about the apparent unreliability and changeability of moods, and why not rather rely on psychology with its natural scientific, objective methodology? In his critique of psychology as a science, Heidegger is mostly concerned with certain questionable metaphysical assumptions underlying psychology. Traditional psychology, like other sciences, treats human beings as if their mode of existence was equivalent to an object (cf. *BT*, 49). Biology and physics become paradigmatic sciences, and the relations between humans or the relation between a human being and his or her world are treated in terms of natural causality. A mood turns into a causal reaction to a specific object which can be quantified and, if so desired, diminished.[14] Once a quantitative framework with its behaviourist implications has been accepted, moods indeed appear alterable. Yet fundamental moods do not even surface within such a framework.

What, in contrast, does a phenomenology of moods have to offer? It investigates moods as phenomena arising out of Being-in-the-world. The focus on the world makes it possible to distinguish between such moods

which are concerned with entities in the world and those fundamental moods which concern everything there is, the whole, or the world. In the case of fear and anxiety, fear is the everyday mood not only because of the arbitrariness of its objects and not because even the subtlest definite object shows itself in a more obvious fashion than the non-object of anxiety, but also because Heidegger is able to provide an explanation for our tendency to try and flee away from anxiety, hiding the phenomenon from ourselves. Fear can be countered by dealing with or removing the object that causes it, yet this is not possible for anxiety; therefore, anxiety is more disturbing and unsettling than fear.

Fundamental moods are moods which determine our world as a whole, and when the mood is revealed to us, it reveals the world. The fundamental mood of anxiety is caused by death as the ultimate limit or, on the ontological rather than strictly existential level, by the impending nothingness. Yet there is a complementary fundamental mood, based on the amazement that there is anything at all, or that there is something rather than nothing. Heidegger names this complementary mood wonder or awe.

The need to conceive of moods in terms of complementariness or polarity is also mentioned by Pina Bausch. Critics often mention in their reviews that her later pieces convey more cheerfulness than the earlier ones. Even though Pina Bausch does not contest this characterization, she points out that cheerfulness calls for its complementary pole, and that her pieces always contain both, cheerfulness and sadness. It is tempting as well as dangerous to ascribe moods to Pina Bausch's pieces. A critic states that the first part of *Rough Cut* is dominated by melancholia, the second one increasingly by cheerfulness (cf. Thöne, 2007). Evidence for such a claim could be collected in the shape of music, facial expressions, and many other elements. Nevertheless is the description dissatisfying. What would a "more" of cheerfulness connote? Instead, Pina Bausch prefers to describe her pieces in terms of hope—and there is always (some) hope. There might even be most hope, or the most resilient hope, in a situation of despair.

The alternative of cheerfulness and sadness (or melancholia) seems to be imposed on Pina Bausch's work by the critics rather than by herself. Perhaps the Heideggerian spectrum between anxiety and awe would be more helpful. Heidegger's analysis of anxiety could be employed in the case of the woman mentioned at the outset of this paper, the woman who might be running away from or toward something. Whereas fear would cause us to run away from a specific object (i.e., the object of our fear), anxiety is not caused by

anything determined. Nevertheless do we tend to flee from it—but there is nothing to flee away from, and nothing to turn toward. Heidegger states that we tend to avoid anxiety by fleeing into the distractions of the world. On Pina Bausch's stage where, in her own words, everything is omitted, such evasion and distraction is not possible.

In relation to moods, the aforementioned ambiguity becomes relevant again. It is often impossible to decide whether a certain scene, a certain gesture or move is a violent or an erotic one. And even describing a gesture as "violent or erotic" is already too rigid since if this alternative is meant to exclude other options. The alternative of violence or eroticism implies a certain willfulness when it is also possible that a given gesture would be much more accidental.

At this point, Pina Bausch's emphasis on longing (*Sehnsucht*) is important. Longing is inherently ambivalent, and it is dynamic. The ambivalence of longing becomes obvious in a 1990 interview. When asked whether she does not become homesick during the times spend with the company in foreign countries, Pina Bausch explains that she likes to come home, but she also likes to leave home. At first, this statement might create an impression of excessive harmony, as if she was just saying that she is content wherever she is. Yet in a vague and open-ended fashion, Pina Bausch adds that there is longing (in fact, she uses the plural: "*diese Sehnsüchte*") – longing which she will "take care not to name" (*PBT*, 227). She states that longing becomes obvious in her work, but that she would need to be a poet in order to intimate the shapes of this longing by way of words.

Pina Bausch suggests that homesickness is always also "aliensickness" (*Fernweh*), or longing for what is alien. Rather than always being content, no matter whether at home or in the alien land, there is always longing. This should not be confused with discontent. It is possible to be comfortable in a foreign land and nevertheless long for the home—and vice versa. The longing which Pina Bausch has in mind is not restricted to longing for the home or longing for the alien; rather, our existence is determined by different shapes and forms of longing. The different shapes have in common that they exhibit the general structure which Heidegger identifies for moods, namely, that they come neither entirely from within nor entirely from without, but arise out of being-in-the-world. When I long for something, this is my longing, but it is also inspired by that which I long for. Longing cannot be reduced to one of these two components. When related to Heidegger's basic polarity between awe and anxiety, it turns out that longing has an element

of both; in that sense, it is more dynamic than Heidegger's ontology of moods. Longing has an element of awe, and yet it is not really inspired by the fact that there is something rather than nothing. More indirectly, there is also an aspect of anxiety in longing, as the anxiety to lose or not ever find what is longed for.

It appears that there is an everyday form of longing as well as longing as a fundamental mood. Heidegger draws between everyday boredom and "deep boredom" (*FC*, 210 ff.). Everyday boredom means being bored at something specific, whereas deep boredom is a fundamental mood and concerns everything (or nothing). Similarly, it would be helpful to distinguish between everyday longing and deep or fundamental longing in Pina Bausch's choreography. Pina Bausch's dancers sometimes long for very specific object (e.g., for a flower or for each other); yet at the same time, there is a sense of indeterminate longing. Longing is what carries through the pieces as well as carries them.

IV. Ambiguity

If Pina Bausch's choreography and phenomenology are indeed as close as this essay has claimed, the question concerning their relation arises. A passage from Merleau-Ponty's late essay "Eye and Mind" is instructive, even though it does not discuss dance, but painting, music, and philosophy:

> But art, especially painting, draws upon this fabric of brute meaning which activism would prefer to ignore. Art and only art does so in full innocence. From the writer and the philosopher, in contrast, we want opinions and advice. We will not allow them to hold the world suspended. We want them to take a stand; they cannot waive the responsibilities of men who speak. Music, at the other extreme, is too far beyond the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain outlines of Being—its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheavals, its turbulences. (*EM*, 161)

It seems to me that a case could be made for dance holding an intermediate position similarly to that of painting. Although dance is intimately connected to music, it is not as embedded in the "ebb and flow," but takes some distance from the elements. Pina Bausch asks us to envision a more encompassing concept of dance where dance would not at all times include

music. Pina Bausch's dance theater is not dance as theater, not theater as dance, but indeed dance theater.[15] Although it includes words (albeit usually in a rather minimal, anecdotal fashion),[16] dance theater does not have to take a stand like philosophy does.

Merleau-Ponty leaves it undecided whether art or philosophy would be superior; in fact, his comparison of the two does not appear to be aimed at establishing a superiority or priority. From a traditional theoretical perspective, philosophy would be superior for its clarity and unequivocal nature. Yet Merleau-Ponty's philosophy places an emphasis on the ambiguity of our existence in the world which one-sided approaches cannot account for.[17] His concept of ambiguity differs somewhat from our normal usage where "ambiguous" connotes "unclear." Instead, an ambiguous phenomenon is a phenomenon that has different sides or angles which stand in tension while nevertheless all belonging essentially to the same phenomenon. Merleau-Ponty identifies ambiguity in the domains of action, history, sexuality, etc. For example, an essential ambiguity arises when trying to determine the limits of the sexual domain. When Merleau-Ponty discusses the body in its sexual being, he calls the sexual an "ambiguous atmosphere" that arises and determines our life (*PP*, 169). He rejects attempts to clearly delimit this realm, but he is also dubious about certain psychoanalytic tendencies to conceive of existence and sexuality as coextensive. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes: "[A]mbiguity is of the essence of human existence" (ibid.).

Dance and specifically dance theater might appear more capable of disclosing ambiguity without giving in to unequivocal interpretations. Dance would be closer to ambiguity because it does not have to take position. However, it is sometimes necessary to thematize ambiguity as ambiguity, and philosophy (especially as phenomenology) allows for such thematization. It is an unsurprising, yet a true statement that the observations on choreography undertaken in this essay would not have been possible without "reading" Pina Bausch against the background of phenomenological accounts.

Furthermore, the mere proximity to ambiguity (rather than thematization of it) which Pina Bausch's work allows for harbors certain dangers when it comes to critique and interpretation. The critique tends to provide an unequivocal interpretation when it, for example, ascribes a specific mood to a piece, disregarding Pina Bausch's insights into the necessary polarity of moods. Another example for a misleading, one-sided interpretation which shall briefly be discussed in this final section concerns the inspirations Pina Bausch's work receives from alien cultures. As mentioned at the outset,

Rough Cut received impulses from a trip to South Korea. It would be a possible, though not necessarily a very fruitful project to try and trace out these impulses.[18] Overall, interpreters of Pina Bausch's work have noticed that her pieces cannot be reduced to influences from alien cultures. Instead, the impression might arise that she is conveying universal ideas which can be "understood anywhere" (Servos in *PBT*, 14).

There are two problems with such an interpretation. Firstly, Pina Bausch's work does not want to convey a definite content, as mentioned above. We are not asked to "understand" her performances unless we learn to engage a new, expanded sense of understanding. Even less so are we meant to understand certain universal ideas. Secondly, it is misleading to assume that Pina Bausch's work delivers a universal content which transcends cultural differences. An attempt at transcending cultural differences might first appear very tolerant, but it actually means ignoring such differences. Instead, Pina Bausch's work acknowledges cultural difference and does not dissolve it into universalism. At the same time, her choreography does not restrict cultural difference to cultural specifics or cultural details. A focus on such identifiable details would make cultural difference small and manageable.

Pina Bausch states that there is "a humanness" (*PBT*, 224) at stake in her work. Such humanness does not dissolve the difference between the home and the alien; rather, this difference is irreducible. It could only be abolished by reducing the alien to the home or vice versa; humanness means to stay away from such reduction. The irreducible difference between home and alien is acknowledged in the ways in which her work opens up to the alien without trying to achieve a full comprehension of it. It is also acknowledged in Pina Bausch's remarks about homesickness and aliensickness, and about the longing which remains. Similarly to the philosophers who have to remain strangers because they can never become entirely at home in the world, Pina Bausch is setting to stage an existence which is always torn between home and alien, always homesick, and always aliensick. It is an existence which, like a rough cut, is unfinished and which never stops longing.

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Notes

[1] As is usually the case with Pina Bausch, the title was decided after the first performances. For her, a title is not a program, but an attempt at naming what is already in existence.

[2] Throughout this essay, Pina Bausch will be referred to by first and last name. This is a conscious decision. Using the first name only (as it is often done) would indicate an undue intimacy whereas the last name without the first name appears incomplete.

[3] The program usually contains photographs, lists of the people involved, information about music, etc., but no explanatory texts.

[4] To be sure, her dancers are extremely talented and have excellent technical skills; but the pieces are not designed to simply highlight those talents and skills.

[5] "Ich bin ja in der glücklichen Lage, meine Stücke nicht analysieren zu müssen. Ich muß sie nur machen" (*PBT*, 234) And: "Das ist etwas ganz Fragiles. Ich habe Angst, nicht die richtigen Worte zu finden; dafür ist mir das viel zu wichtig (…) Ich möchte das gar nicht antasten" (ibid.)

[6] In his discussion of Pina Bausch's work, Norbert Servos states that she is trying to offer a perspective of the world as free of prejudice as possible (*PBT*, 12). He also points out that she brings to the fore what has become a second nature to us such that we need distance in order to notice it (*PBT*, 29).

[7] *PP*, xiii. Merleau-Ponty is here citing a formulation provided by Eugen Fink.

[8] For a deeper analysis of this disclosure, cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art* in Heidegger (1993).

[9] Left out are, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre's analyses.

[10] It has to be kept in mind that this latter statement does not point to a biologistic philosophy in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, but simply wants to emphasize that our body enables as well as inhibits us, and that we are not at all free-floating spirits, accessing the world from an immaterial and uninvolved standpoint. Asking what it means to be a human involves an examination of our bodily situatedness, bodily movement, spatiality, etc.

[11] Cf. Dillon, 1983. Dillon explains Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy by focusing on its continuity with his early thinking rather than a radical break. According to Dillon, double sensations are instrumental for understanding the late notion of "chiasm."

[12] On repetition, cf. also Fernandes, 2002.

[13] The emphasis on *Sehnsucht* has inspired the title of a *Tagesspiegel* article on the occasion of Pina Bausch's 65th birthday: "Sinn und Sehnsucht" (July 27, 2005).

[14] A much more detailed and differentiated phenomenological account of the contradictions in certain psychological methods is the one developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, especially in his *Phenomenology of Perception*.

[15] I do not mean to claim that other dance performances would be incapable of conveying the disclosures discussed in this paper. Rather, Pina Bausch's dance theater was used as an exemplary. But the themes discussed in this paper are characteristic of her work, and I believe it could be shown that only her work combines the disclosure of the body in the three modes investigated here with a disclosure of dynamic and polar emotionality as longing.

Obviously, it is not possible to develop a phenomenology of dance in the space of an essay. The project of a phenomenology of dance has been undertaken by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. My approach, aside from being much less comprehensive, differs from hers in that she places a lot of emphasis on forms and symbols. If considered from a Merleau-Pontian perspective, it seems to me that Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's project errs somewhat on the side of intellectualism (without, of course, being intellectualist as such). In contrast, Sondra Fraleigh's texts could be described as closer to empiricism; she focuses very much on a description of the dance experience.

Sondra Fraleigh chooses "a first-person voice for the dancer, the choreographer, and the teacher/therapist" (Fraleigh, 2000, p. 54) and does not provide much interpretation, even though she mentions the possibility of such interpretation. Phrased in Heidegger's terminology, Fraleigh focuses mostly on what comes "from inside" while Sheets tends toward what arises the "from outside."

[16] Let me give an example from *Rough Cut*: While beating up a pile of white pillows and blankets which turns out to represent dough, a dancer states that he has been kneading dough all night but that he kept thinking he forgot something. And then he realized -- he forgot the yeast. This simple episode serves as a parable for those moments when we suspect we forgot something, or when we realize that something has indeed been forgotten, perhaps even the most essential thing. On a more general level, the episode points to the necessity of taking up certain possibilities at the expense of others, and to the fact that attention has forgetfulness as its reverse side.

[17] In his classic work *Une philosophie de l'ambiguïté. L'existentialisme de Merleau-Ponty*, Alphonse de Waelhens designates Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as a philosophy of ambiguity.

[18] Martina Thöne (2007) mentions Korean songs, Chinese cabbage, and escalators.