

# ON THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE MATERIAL

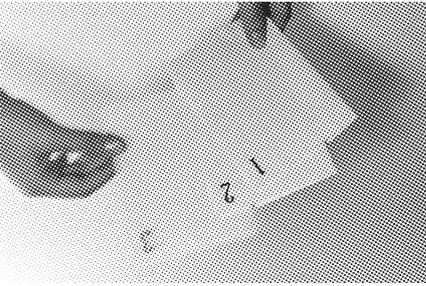
Special thanks to Vanessa Grasse, Carolyn Roy and Eva Karczag for their thoughtful feedback.

the unfolding material and composition. steer the dynamic interplay of these strands in the service of the performer being «in the dance» who has to navigate and indeed the material is altered by these factors; however it is itself, thereby revealing new facets of themselves to them- audience member to inhabit their own imagination and exper- piece; include the moving relationship between me, the mate- allows listening without disturbance to the material and the As a performer this requires that I sustain an open channel that changes the perceived and vice versa.

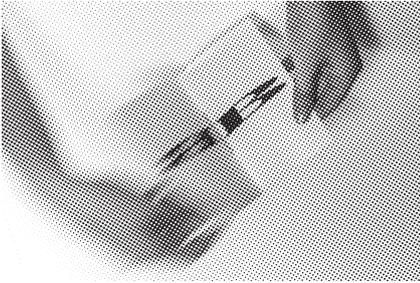
Through their presence and attention they become part of the actual setting, altering the material because the performer The audience modulates through their perception their indi- by bodies, which obviously affects and alters the material.

ily, gut level. Bodies speak to bodies as they are heard and seen- accompanies an immediacy of communication on a very bod- er as humans – though not on a verbal level – which- manage-situation spectator and performer encounter each oth- cates above all on visual and kinesthetic levels. In a perfor- Dance is by its nature a multi-sensorial art-form but communi- Audience – performer – material

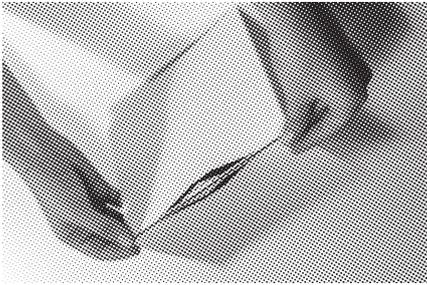
## ON THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE MATERIAL



MIRA HIRTZ TALKS TO  
BETTINA NEUHAUS



reciprocal turn



Issue # 2



# MIRA HIRTZ TALKS TO BETTINA NEUHAUS

1. Entities that are different from the subjective «I» are named objects. If we use them to shape our ideas, if we touch them to relate to the foreign and the similar, if we mimic them to adopt to the world, we call them material. The understanding of material is not limited to a certain graspable substance, but especially in bodily movement widens to notions as weight, time and space. It is material before even framing it as such, in the process of creation as well as in the process of experience of the audience.

What do you consider as objects within your choreographic work? What is the material you work with?

The tangible / non-tangible body

As a dance artist the material I work with is probably best described as a configuration of the relationship between different strands rather than specific, distinct «matter».

I deal with the body in motion, with its tangible living matter, (such as skin, bones, muscles, fluids, connective tissue, etc.) as well as its intangible reality composed of multi-sensorial systems, stored knowledge, experience, intuition, imagination, memory, history, ...

In the living body tangible and intangible live and operate as one

Malleability of different movement material, and particularly movement material, is malleable. However the degree of its elasticity depends on its structure and its relationship to other materials (sound, space, other performers, cues ...).

Movement material as used in set choreography might be precisely defined in shape, timing and spatial orientation to the last detail. The higher the degree of refinement and the denser the structure of interdependent relationships with other materials, the lower is the degree of malleability, which then needs to be found by the performer on a «microscopic» level.

Instead of applying accurately pre-choreographed movement material, instant composition operates through compositional structures and principles as a way to generate material and composition in the actual moment of the performance. Being engaged in the emerging material as a response to multiple channels of information, the performer must master a continuous malleability, ranging from microscopic to macroscopic, as a way to find determination and clear choices whilst keeping the material in its core alive.

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along with change and transformation is for me key to the  
 This aspect of «moving or passing through», which goes  
 creator of form.  
 es and moves «through» the matter. The body is form and  
 a form. Instead it is through movement that form emerg-  
 «into» in my understanding doesn't mean that we move  
 The term «performance» refers to «per-formare», which  
 solve.  
 pass through the body and then «leave» it as they dis-  
 sensations, energies, awarenesses and images that  
 form. Within each danced movement are multiple  
 static and unchangeable, dance is an ephemeral art  
 shaped into a final form that is more or less solid,  
 Further, rather than material being worked and  
 both: the «I» and the «material».

added layer of complexity. The dancer is  
 wood, paint or clay) in dance there is an  
 non-corporeal materials (e.g. a piece of  
 Unlike other art forms that work with  
 of becoming, recomposing itself.  
 on one level the body is always in a state  
 changing world surrounding it. Thus,  
 ing body and its relation with the  
 happening simultaneously in the liv-  
 orchestration of multiple activities  
 the highly coordinated and tuned  
 It is on this level that dance begins:  
 ally is activity, is movement.  
 And the inherent nature of this re-  
 inseparably interrelated reality.

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nature of dancing and thus it is one of the core principles I'm  
 interested in when performing and making dance work.

## Space and time

In working with and through the body as «material» one must  
 acknowledge its existence in space and time. And both space  
 and time are dynamic.

Things live in time and have duration. Varying the span of time  
 allocated to a given movement changes that movement, altering  
 its relationship with other elements.

Similarly space and body can't be separated: the body is «in»  
 space and there is no movement without space. But also, space  
 is «in» the body. Being composed of spacious matter it is itself  
 spatial and in moving creates space, transforming internal  
 space and the space around.

As cultural theorist and artist Erin Manning concludes: «Move-  
 ment is one with the world, not body/world but body-worlding».<sup>1</sup>

Further each point in space has its specificity. It follows that  
 from each point in space the same movement vi-  
 brates differently and lives in a meshwork  
 of different relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> Erin Manning: «Relationscapes: Movement, art, philosophy», p.1, Cambridge 2009.

actual context can the material have its full life each time anew.  
 courant with the material. Only by being vibrant within the  
 embrace the actual details of difference. In short: to keep au-  
 its characteristic flow in time and space and yet to notice and  
 cess every time the core of the original material, to move with  
 terial living in the present moment. The challenge is to re-ac-  
 give the performer specific information about the actual ma-  
 space with different light, sonic qualities or atmosphere) and  
 are always at play (e.g. the state of the body, a performance  
 When reproducing movement material these changing factors  
 constant flux and transformation.

Underlying its inner corporeal processes as well as the chang-  
 ing world, the living body as material is at any moment in  
 Aliveness of material

In the context of a performance the material changes because  
 of several factors:

*4. Having a daily or an artistic practice can change when confronted with an audience. There is a big difference in terms of effect and affect if one relates to the audience in a mode of representation or of witnessing. Is the material changing within a show? In which dimensions do you work with closeness and sensational impact to abandon a framing judgment?*

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from in-between» (inter-legere). It is this intelligence within a  
 material that I aim to access through perceptual attention and  
 to which I respond through my actions and choices.<sup>2</sup>

Accessing this intelligence is part of getting to know the charac-  
 teristics of a material and requires more than reflection from a  
 «distance». I need to engage with material through activity and  
 by working with it on a bodily level along multiple pathways.

It is a way of working from «within» rather than from without,  
 being «in» the material and «in» the dance.

This requires opening all one's sensory channels, engaging  
 through deep physicality with mind and body in each move-  
 ment and being receptive to its «voice». Thus I can hopefully  
 hear what a movement «says» in space and time and be recep-  
 tive to what wants to evolve next.

Without noticing the intelligence of the material one might tend  
 to navigate towards static «ideas» or accumulate «detached»  
 (movement) material that masks the original one.

To conclude: the «intelligence» within a material gives direction  
 to its further journeying; it can become a thread the dancer can  
 follow through attention and intuition and it steers  
 an organic evolution of the process that  
 resides from and stays true to  
 the heart of the  
 material.

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<sup>2</sup> In case of the body the materials are bones, tissues, skin, organs and the dif-  
 ferent sensory modalities, the sense for time, space, the imagination ... as outlined  
 in question 1)



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*Who and what is creating within your work? Do you consider control as more or less absolute. ritual as more or less active or passive and their own ability of action is questioned. One can thereby esteem objects and material as more or less active or passive and their own ability of*

*2. Dance is often referred to as a practice that investigates the dichotomies of me and the other, the inside and the outside. If these categories are questioned, then also the initiating point of action is questioned. One can thereby esteem objects and material as more or less active or passive and their own ability of*

*control as more or less absolute. ritual as more or less active or passive and their own ability of action is questioned. One can thereby esteem objects and material as more or less active or passive and their own ability of*

*attention as part of the material in the mobile and relational nature of its role within making and performing. Attention detects details, differences and change. It listens with a certain curiosity and openness to the perception of what is happening. It hears what is being said as something is in the process of becoming. It alters the perceiver and the perceived, the «I» and the «material»; it steers their ongoing changing relationship, communicating to the audience and possibly directing their attention. I consider attention to be a significant ingredient of the material and the dance.*



## Fluidity versus dichotomy

To an extent the distinction between «inner» and «outer», between «me» and «the other» might help in framing the complexity we are dealing with, offering an understanding of particular manifestations. However this separation and simplification ignores essential facets of our being-in-the-world. As artist I feel the need to question this profoundly established notion of dichotomy and invite into my practice a wider and more fluid understanding of moving and dancing as part of our embodied, environmental and social nature.

Where does the body begin and where does it end? What is inner and what outer?

Depending on the context and from which angle we look at these questions we find different insights and answers.

For example, considering the skin with its semi-permeability, that allows an exchange of moisture, air and energy with our surroundings, is different from starting with our visual sense that identifies the visible outlines of the body, which is different again from an approach that looks at the body on a subatomic level, where there is no longer any solidity but instead an oscillating field of waves with a unique rhythmical pattern of energy vibration that is individual to each of us.

Each perspective provides a different view on the material thus revealing different aspects of it.

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*I believe that this intrinsic information and the interrelation between the different strands within a material can be considered as an «embodied intelligence»; in the sense of «intelligence» (Latin) as the «faculty of understanding», the ability of discerning and comprehending in the sense of «reading*

*direction, movement, new constellations or transformations; lighting its potential; that is to say they indicate tendencies of These resonate in the material, defining its actuality and highlighting its ontology, history, evolution, culture etc. concerning its physical properties and internal connections as Every material affords a wide spectrum of specific information Intelligence*

*3. These questions connect to the notion of the intelligence of the material. The «I» produces something, at the same time there is something already happening. One shapes, as well as one may support something already happening. Looking for the potentiality of material that already exists also implies meeting its partial unavailability that causes a crisis of identification. How do you encounter the intelligence of the material?*

The work unfolds along these multiple relationships moving; that speaks with the collective voice of these many strands.

The essential question is: do we dare to deal with this multiplicity of coexistence? Can we handle the numerous differences within the material, (that is e.g. partially the tangible and partially intangible), in dancing and celebrate both their individuation and integration as we move and compose?

*Immersing oneself in the actual activity as mode of creating*  
Immersing myself in this welling fluidity of the material(s) is the mode I work from and through. If a «material» is defined as something active it must be an amalgam of multiple activities dormant in it like seeds:

A song unravels its multi-layered life only through the activity of singing, which in turn houses further activities such as breathing, vibrating, directing, articulating, voicing, listening, tuning, stilling, imagining ... all living together in «singing».

I immerse myself in singing by engaging body, attention, imagination, compositional mind, intuition, and sense of time, space and poetry as a way to activate the multiple relationships between the «I», the activity, the surrounding and what unfolds as composition. I'm becoming «the singing». Similarly, one could say I'm becoming «the dancing».