

## Book Review

*Bandoneon. Working with Pina Bausch*  
 by Raimund Hoghe with photography by Ulli Weiss, translated  
 by Penny Black, edited by Katalin Trencsényi  
 (London: Oberon Books, 2016)

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This book, edited by Katalin Trencsényi and published by Oberon Books in 2016, is an excellent resource on the work of the late German choreographer Pina Bausch (1940–2009). The core of the book is a new translation of rehearsal diaries documented by dance-dramaturg and performance maker Raimund Hoghe, accompanied by photos by Ulli Weiss, who both worked with Bausch and the Tanztheater Wuppertal on the production of the piece *Bandoneon* in 1980. This book is an edited extension of the original German book, published in 1981 under the title *Bandoneon – für was kann Tango alles gut sein?*

This new edition, which includes translator's notes, a cast list of the original production, and a short biography of Pina Bausch, is structured around the original text by Hoghe and images by Weiss with an added informative introduction by Katalin Trencsényi. It includes the reproduction of childhood photographs of the cast of *Bandoneon* as published in the original Tanztheater Wuppertal programme notes, and an extensive portrait of Raimund Hoghe in interview with Trencsényi.

The substantial introduction by the editor gives the reader a rare insight into the influences of American postmodern dance and visual art movements, such as Fluxus and Happenings, on the aesthetics, theatrical codes, and rehearsal processes of Pina Bausch. This insightful analysis is matched by a reaffirming of the better-known influence of the European modernist *Ausdruckstanz* legacy on the work of Bausch, most distinctly through the mentorship of choreographer Kurt Jooss and his choreographic and pedagogical collaborators, such as Jean Cebron and Hans Züllig. All this is presented convincingly as a foundation for Bausch's rejection of ballet traditions during her time as the director of Tanztheater Wuppertal and her quest to develop unique modes of choreographic expression, processing and presentation.

Trencsényi gives a brilliant overview on Bausch's oeuvre and her complex collaborative approach to dance-theatre making. The introduction details how Bausch's collaborations with musical designers, dancers and musical directors form a complex layered collage of interdisciplinary performance practice. The strength of the introduction is the author's ability to open out a nearly incomprehensible, non-linear, non-verbal and cross-disciplinary collaborative artistic process to the reader in convincing ways. Bausch's shift from early opera interpretations addressing large tragic themes, to fragmented absurdist, surreal and epic collages—always drawing on sensory and personal experiences of the collaborating dancers—is placed in context through an analysis of her later travel residency pieces. These appear, according to the author, more commercial or formulaic. Indeed, Trencsényi suggests that by the end of her career “Bausch's visual trademarks are recognisable, even predictable sometimes. They no longer shock or surprise the audience” (29). She speculates that the increasingly—and surprisingly—predictable nature of Bausch's work is due to the integration of digital technology as well as changes to the ensemble, which lost some its stronger personalities. By way of example, the author describes moments of a rehearsal documentary from 2003, where dancers present rather clichéd caricatures of Bausch signature material to the unimpressed choreographer.

The introduction gives the reader an understanding of the relevance of Bausch's groundbreaking work concerned with “human vulnerability, our desire for connection, and the power games we enact in our relationships” (32). Trencsényi proposes that the working method Bausch developed together with her ensemble became the foundation for current modes of collaborative theatre-making and contemporary dance. She suggests that “Bausch's method of asking ‘mobilising questions’ from her dancer-collaborators was developed in the rehearsal room together with the company and was groundbreaking in the dance context” (32). Trencsényi describes Bausch's rather secret way of working—often not revealing her direction or purpose to the dancers—as a risky process, without a working tradition to fall back onto. Her writings, at times referring to Hoghe's notes, reveal Bausch as a choreographic director or facilitator who preferred to work organically without a plan, but who developed a questioning approach. Bausch herself described this as an “open way of working” but again a very precise one (33–34). Hoghe's diary and the images by Weiss document this way of working in vivid, personal and witty anecdotal ways. Trencsényi reveals that this choreographic questioning to capture feelings, memories and experiences emerged initially from necessity when Bausch worked with a group of dancers and non-dancers in her early *Macbeth* piece which involved actors, a singer and even a confectioner.

Trencsényi's introductory chapter and Hoghe's diary detail the creative and often exhausting collaborative ways of working—“bit by bit, from the inside out”—developed by Bausch (35). The reader begins to understand how such an inductive, explorative and developmental process inevitably jars with professional modes of choreographic production, and working conditions within the German Staatstheater system. Trencsényi's work also gives an insight into Bausch's collaborations with set designers. Responding to Hoghe's writings she identifies a cyclical pattern of practice in Bausch's choreographic work. First, there is a process of research and gathering, where questions are asked and

the choreographer observes the creative process of the dancers, as a listening process. This is followed by a labelling process, as Bausch begins to focus on certain ideas and materials. This material is further developed by Bausch in collaboration with the dancers and alongside other shortlisted materials through a process of testing and fine-tuning. Third, there is the arranging of choreographic building blocks and a trialling of how they work in relation to one another, and the finding of a larger form through compositional devices, for example repetition, canon or fugue. This is described as a filtering process, of ordering and reordering in relation to music, seeking an intuitive, collaged logic. Fourth, and finally, there is a paring down and refining of existing material.

Taken together, Trencsényi's and Hoghe's writings reveal Bausch's interest in the detail of human behaviour, the marginal, the everyday and the real, an aesthetic Trencsényi links to the work of Walter Benjamin and his interest in premonition, omens, and childhood as resources for creative process. This is confirmed in Hoghe's diaries and the dancers' personal photographs from the programme notes of *Bandoneon*. He often refers to memories of childhood and personal history as key motifs for the creation of choreographic material, or themes of human interaction. *Bandoneon* was the second piece that Bausch created after her partner Rolf Borzik's untimely death and Trencsényi highlights Bausch's interest in themes of loving someone and being loved, creating a world of the tango without using tango steps.

The choreographic process for the creation of *Bandoneon* is documented extensively through the diary of Raimund Hoghe who Trencsényi, a leading dramaturg herself, identifies as "the world's first dance dramaturg" (46). The diaries can be read as a practical logbook, but also as a meticulous journalistic probing of the artistry of Bausch. Hoghe had worked initially as a journalist in the nearby city of Düsseldorf. Working with Tanztheater Wuppertal he immediately developed a close friendship with Bausch with whom he collaborated between 1979 and 1989, driven by a shared "interest in watching people" (47).

The working relationship between Bausch and Hoghe is described as a dialogic process, as Hoghe took over Borzik's working role in the creation of *1980* and *Bandoneon*. Trencsényi offers an interesting analysis of the role of the dance-dramaturg within a choreographic devising process. She suggests that the Bausch/Hoghe relationship can offer a case study for contemporary working practice of "connected thinking" within collaborative choreographic practice (see Haring-Smith 1997, 48), where the place of the dramaturg is, as Hoghe puts it "to gain insights, yet keep secrets" (52).

Trencsényi discusses Hoghe's dance dramaturgy as an early example of "new dramaturgy" (58) or "decentered dramaturgy" (57), where the dramaturg is supporting the gentle facilitation of a collaborative process.<sup>1</sup> His diary, she states, "reads like the account of an intelligent collaborator in the ensemble and a sensitive friend" (54). The editor makes an argument for the role of dramaturgy in contemporary theatre as a crucial role of "the weaving together of the material that will constitute the texture of the performance" (60). She recommends this book as a dramaturgy source book, or as

translator, Penny Black notes, “as a guide to discovery, and trust in, the creative artistic process” (72).

The intimacy of the original German in Hoghe’s diary is meticulously translated into a fluent and evocative English text by Penny Black. Hoghe’s personal recollections of Bausch’s dialogue with the dancers’ memories, imagination and embodied associations are beautifully balanced with the intensely sensual and at times surreal photographs of Ulli Weiss, which capture the intimate world and visceral relationship between performers on stage as well as between performers and spectators. The interview with Hoghe, which unfortunately has no date or place as reference, gives an insight into his work as a dramaturg and also as an internationally acclaimed solo performer and ensemble choreographer. The inclusion of the interview in this book puts Hoghe’s work with Pina Bausch into historical context, and exemplifies contemporary dramaturgy-driven dance theatre within the Bausch-lineage through verbatim material very well.

This is a wonderful book which captures, archives and redistributes an important moment in choreographic practice through process documentation and contextual writing. The editor has done an excellent job extending the initial writings of Hoghe, which are a gift in their own right, to confirm the contemporary relevance of the *Bandoneon* case study for the fields of dance studies and dramaturgy, while honouring the artistic vision of the late Pina Bausch and her collaborators.

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## Notes

1. Trencsényi refers here to a terminology introduced by dance dramaturg and theorist Guy Cools (2005).

## Works Cited

- Cools, Guy. 2005. “zero degrees: Genesis of an Encounter.” Programme notes *zero degrees*, Sadlers Wells: London.
- Haring-Smith, Tori. 1997. “The Dramaturg as Androgyne. Thoughts on the Nature of Dramaturgical Collaboration.” In *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Source Book*, edited by Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehl, and Michael Lupu, 137–143. Orlando: Harcourt, Brace & Company.

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