

Collectivity and Criticism: (Fragments of) Conversations on Post-dance

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Writingshop*

Post-dance first unfolded as a conference in MDT in Stockholm, 14-16 October, 2015, created by Danjel Andersson, Andre Lepecki and Gabriel Smeds, and was followed by a multi-authored publication co-edited by Andersson, Mette Edvardsen and Mårten Spångberg (March 2017) that sought to delineate post-dance as a mode of thinking about an expanded contemporary dance and choreographic practice.

This experiment in collective criticism thinks through and around post-dance as a critical moment in contemporary dance practice. Authored by Writingshop, a long-term collaborative project between four European critics examining the processes, modes and politics of contemporary, collective critical practice, it intersperses multi-authored notes from and on post-dance with a timeline. This timeline is an edited transcript of the conversation that gave rise to the notes, taking place in a side-chat, on a live Google document. At the same time, whilst this has been a process of selection, there has been little editorial intervention into the chat, in order to preserve its chronology and dynamics, and acknowledge the challenges of us arriving in this document together, from four different places, with different forms of access and points of entry into language.



Anette Pettersen: are we all writing this text?
Karl Svantesson: after 22:30
Diana Damian: Sergio we were supposed to chat then
Karl Svantesson: yes that could be a possibility
Sergio Lo Gatto: @Diana oh yes! 😊
Anette Pettersen: late thursday should work
Diana Damian: 22:30 works for me
Sergio we could talk a bit before? 22:00?
Sergio Lo Gatto: wait
Karl Svantesson: but i mean also that i write the field work
Anette Pettersen: i can also join at 22
Karl Svantesson: thursday?
Sergio Lo Gatto: yeah fine by me thursday 22 (UK time?)
Diana Damian: no 22 Swedish Italian time
Diana Damian: 9pm london time
Sergio Lo Gatto: ok
Karl Svantesson: or we just go on i think we can do it for the december number as well
Diana Damian: 10pm Lo Gatto time

This enters in conversation with *Post-Dance*, itself a loosely edited book.

Karl Svantesson: no Diana
Diana Damian: yes Karl?
Karl Svantesson: don't take it away i loved that
Diana Damian: oh ok
voila
Karl Svantesson: thanks
Diana Damian: 😊

What follows both “anonymizes” and makes transparent the voices of four writers, with the contradictions, multiple directions and re-stating that occurs in such a joint occupation of writerly space. Writingshop often considers how to articulate collaborative thinking that is responsive, unfolds over time and does not follow, but might sometimes occupy, established models of critique.

Anette Pettersen: so – this text needs to be finished by the beginning of October, right? if we agree on an angle / questions now, could we not make a deadline for everyone to respond/write into the document, and then do a final editing?
Karl Svantesson: I love this

Karl Svantesson: Chauchat writes about this in her article, “we may develop ethical relationships to everything we are part of, as implicated or entangled subjects”

Sergio Lo Gatto: the thing is that post-dance is a critical tool itself. so I would fly lower, rather than doing criticism of the criticism

Diana Damian: yes Sergio kind of agree

Sergio Lo Gatto: I think that one of the first issues we have to discuss about post-dance is its mode of distribution, its non-market

Diana Damian: isn't that what we do, too?

Anette Pettersen: what do you mean?

Sergio Lo Gatto: I had a ferocious discussion with Gaia about this, as soon as I was back from Kristiansand, she was completely against this mode of distribution.

Anette Pettersen: but what do you mean with distribution and non-market?

Sergio Lo Gatto: well, one of the most evident characteristics of the book (even before the structure and the content) is the way they decided to produce knowledge and not to share it in the conventional way

Karl Svantesson: they were not allowed to sell it that was the deal

Diana Damian: and what is the conventional way?

Sergio Lo Gatto: the conventional way is...

that you give the audience the opportunity to read to buy the actual book

Karl Svantesson: They were given funds to distribute not to sell I think

Sergio Lo Gatto: or read for free

Karl Svantesson: Yes of course

Diana Damian: but isn't this mode of distribution acknowledging a network that actually happens anyway but without the economics?

Anette Pettersen: but I think that is also a choice, right?

Sergio Lo Gatto: to me it's quite a conundrum

Diana Damian: it travels to the same people

Sergio Lo Gatto: yes that's what I'm saying

Diana Damian: except there's no false sense of buying and selling between them

Karl Svantesson: I like that but still they got paid to do their thing as with the festival the book took birth from

Sergio Lo Gatto: that's one point

Anette Pettersen: but that's also a way of playing with market strategies, making the book a desired object

The question of distribution seems fundamental to *Post-dance* and the kind of space it seeks to occupy; as of this year, to our knowledge, the book is fully accessible online (and at some libraries) not by means of the conference website, but one of the authors (Mårten Spångberg). In its early days, the book was free, and passed around intersecting communities, through festivals, venues and by means of incidental encounters. This is a pertinent mode of thinking about how discourse is embedded in a community, by acknowledging how networks of knowledge shape around political aesthetics; its exclusivity is also a kind of staging of familiarity.



We, as a group of critics, tried to materialize what actually came out of this kind of concept investigation as *Post-dance*, both as a conference and publication. Was there actually anything coming out of it for us, as outside readers-not participants of the conference, as a summary where all the texts were put together like this collage of different voices, more than a history reading of dance and choreography on the whole, passing through and beyond modernism? Yes, there was, and that was this highly future and present ongoing, orientated thing of wanting to step out of any given form governed by power structures, gender binaries and abilities. And this, then, created this kind of blow out, strictly individual and sometimes too academic sum of voices trying to reach out as a collective approach but failing to do so. Much like the task of our own. Which made it even more interesting and intriguing and devastating.

Sergio Lo Gatto: but generally, I'm still attached and in love with an idea of open culture

Diana Damian: but what is the resistance to this?

Karl Svantesson: and the post-dance festival itself was kind of an invited festival open only to those who were invited

Sergio Lo Gatto: that that book will be read by a very selected readership

Anette Pettersen: but the difficulty with this way of distribution is that it becomes a collectors item more than shared readership

Diana Damian: because if it is access I think that it's the market that upholds that idea, not the networks in which knowledge travels

Anette Pettersen: @Sergio – yes

Diana Damian: think about academic books

Karl Svantesson: yes but now it's spreading

Diana Damian: they tend to live in libraries or are only accessible to those with a fair amount of money

Sergio Lo Gatto: but still it's a community

Karl Svantesson: and its very academic much more than Swedish Dance History

Sergio Lo Gatto: I can ask my university to buy books for me

Diana Damian: yes but it also lack – deliberately – curatorial focus

Anette Pettersen: but Post dance and Swedish Dance History are not in libraries, I think, and couldn't that also be as problematic?

Sergio Lo Gatto: if I don't want to spend money on that

Diana Damian: yes, for you – but that's because you are a student there that's a closed network

Sergio Lo Gatto: @Anette – yes

Anette Pettersen: also, we have copies of the book because we know the people making the books

Karl Svantesson: problematic yes

Anette Pettersen: part of the elite

As it turns out, since Post-Dance has an ISBN number, it also has to be deposited to the national library of the country where the ISBN is registered. This means that neither Post-Dance nor Swedish Dance History are necessarily available at libraries outside of Sweden. Even though the content of the book, and perhaps also the intention of its writers/makers, are multi- or international, the distribution of it on some level still remain national and steered/ruled/?? by the funding of the project and its initiators (or, even; to be in a position to initiate a project one also has to have some relation to funding authorities).

Post-dance is: walking into the cavernous new space of Tate Modern, concrete and brutal, slick and vast, in the midst of the referendum to remain or leave in the European Union a year ago, and encountering the work of Romanian artists Manuel Pelmus and Alexandra Pirici—itself a re-enactment of Harun Farocki's cinematic work, *Workers Leaving the Factory*. In the basement of an art institution on the verge of major political shifts, Romanian workers accidentally, or perhaps deliberately, enact a scene of low-skilled labor, the very kind that has caused such a representational rupture from East to West; the kind that made headlines when the country's tabloids professed the entering of 29 million immigrants from the region, more than the combined population of Romania and Bulgaria.

So, perhaps, *Post-dance* wraps itself around these instances in which movement is being thought, enacted, confronted, but also the ways in which movement makes itself known. But post-dance is also predominantly white, Euro-centric, probing a question about visibility and the power of frames in contemporary practice.

We might think of post-dance not as what follows dance, but what is already woven into dance: the way it frames our encounters with other bodies and politics, and the ways in which, in turn, these shape our movement. In "I Had a Dream," the essay that opens the publication, Danjel Andersson proposes post-dance as an open-source concept—one shaped around an invited community. This is a kind of thinking in reversal, in which the net is cast in the air, before anything material has come to take shape; and, indeed, post-dance emerged in the midst of an autumnal conference in Stockholm before it materialized as a co-edited book.



Sergio Lo Gatto: but come on, Diana, if one wants or needs a book or an article, they can be tracked and bought of course you need to pay for that

Diana Damian: yes exactly, though

Sergio Lo Gatto: (if it's not on libgen or whatever shadow peer to peer website)

Diana Damian: so this to me seems like in the end, it partly benefits funders, not people involved, who are essentially paying money to each other they don't really see

Sergio Lo Gatto: I still think that it's reasonable to ask money for a product of knowledge

Diana Damian: yes

i'm not saying that

Anette Pettersen: i quite like the idea of making a limited amount of books and giving them away for free, but that also makes them available for a very limited group of people

Diana Damian: but i also think the how is important it feels more transparent to me, doing that

Karl Svantesson: but the content with all the articles put together like an anthology it clearly makes a standpoint and raises a question beyond market issues

Sergio Lo Gatto: @Anette – yes

Diana Damian: yes agree @Karl

Josefin Wikström's article, "Notes on Post-dance," unfolds a lot of the whole score from the entire publication: its relativism, "bravery," and academic voyeurism. Wikström is trying to make sense of the topic term and, through her brief history lesson, her article is a good starting point to get into it. Wikström tells us that the term "post-dance" came out of curatorial context, coined by Danjel Andersson, for the international conference launched at MDT 2015. It was never outlined as anything else then as an offer for further discussions where choreographic imagination has landed from the 1960s up until now.

But the term "post" is problematic. It awakes and dies at the same time. It affirms or declines, and this is also what makes it so interesting when put together with dance, it goes physical. The body in movement can then be described as something here; declining. And so can text.

What Wikström does is opening up the term with open questions, as if post-dance could be a self-critical historical standpoint for all the participants in the festival. Josefine Wikström has several usable proposals for the term and what it *might* mean, such as:

Another interrelated way of thinking of the term "post-dance" is to understand it as the negation of dance as a medium, in the way that Greenberg, after Gotthold Lessing, argued that each specific art form is on a quest for its essence. The choreographers of the 1960s, whose entire practices rejected dance as a medium-specific discipline and instead saw dance as art, already did this. For them, everyone was an artist. Following this line of thought, "post-dance" might be seen as the institutionalisation of a process begun sixty years ago but not institutionally established until now.

Sitting in the main auditorium at the Opera, watching the National Ballet Company performing, this institutionalization seems to still be in the periphery. What is seen as the institution by some is, perhaps, thought of as avant-garde (or even non-art) by others. Bojana Kunst writes: "I believe that dance has the power to challenge the contemporary fetishization of immateriality and twist the processes of abstraction in advanced capitalism

with its weight and material quality.” Maybe looking at what dance, or post-dance, *can* be, what potential powers it can have is a more productive way of thinking than trying to say what it *is*.

Karl Svantesson: and that is WHAT IS DANCE TODAY

Sergio Lo Gatto: @Diana, @Karl, but maybe the question should become: who are you addressing to?

Anette Pettersen: it absolutely does, @Karl, but i'm just saying that we are a part of the selected people, so to say, so easy for us to like it

Karl Svantesson: in a performance-based artfield

Anette Pettersen: agree @Karl

In a conversation, one of the editors of *Post-Dance*, Mette Edvardsen, spoke of her own works and how they are perceived, and, instead of asking whether something is dance or not, she wanted to reframe the question: can dance be more? This might also be a fruitful way of approaching the term post-dance.

Diana Damian: okay so let me bring in Bojana Kunst to this remember when she talks about the shadows of neoliberalism- the idea of creativity as being something that can benefit the image of the corporate sector; and how in fact, the 'project' has become a conventional working structure well beyond the arts i think this connects up to what you raise

Sergio because the idea of distribution or access feels completely tied in to the market so any resistance to the market, then, gains some significance even if it fails

Karl Svantesson: YES Diana and that is a starting point because this is important stuff because elite or not it makes sense for all of us engaged or not

Diana Damian: and there is a kind of acknowledgment of who is involved in the first place which is problematic, but i like that attempt like looking at who is in the room, and then deciding how to let people in i've had wine, that was a shit metaphor

Sergio Lo Gatto: @Diana, still not sure about the final outcome of this. still have the feeling of a small failure or, at least, a negotiation with a marginality that is driven by the market itself: I mean that the only people able to have access to Post-dance are part of the same AGORA, the same community. Like on Facebook: I am able to share my contents only among my "friends", and the new algorithm is narrowing. So the question comes back: who is Post-dance addressing?

Post-dance, then, is not just a proposition that is inherently tied to the privileges of certain parts of Europe, and the agency of movement that itself becomes a conceptual framing for thinking about bodies in space; it is also a break with duration, in which the promise of something is no longer posited—the dance of the future—but has already aged; post-dance is not, however, simply something that has passed, it is also a past that takes place in the future.

And, then, it makes libraries what? Maybe, out of date?

Diana Damian: so it is always going to start by being a reaction to a community which is kind of itself

Karl Svantesson: the book is a process not a finished content this is how they (danjel and mårten) sees it, but all the authors moves on working on their own opics

Sergio Lo Gatto: (and they were paid for this)

Diana Damian: where did the money come from?

i guess we are talking about three things : 1 ETHICS 2 POLITICS 3 ART
and how they tie into the same question

i am increasing thinking about the bullshitness of academic publishing which pays authors nothing, but prices books as commodities that cost more than £50

where's the fucking knowledge community in that?

who gets to even read those?

Sergio Lo Gatto: I would add 4. COMMUNITY / COMMUNICATION ECOLOGY

Karl Svantesson: and their topics are interesting when put together because it makes the dance field wider more vivid

Diana Damian: post-dance at least acknowledges a support structure (money) and an intent (process)

I love the use of ecology here @Sergio

Karl Svantesson: me too



Neoliberalism is establishing its agenda and its rhetorical discourse by embedding itself in the media environment, in itself, rapidly changing and constantly evolving. Should post-dance be observed through its dialogue with the “post-reality” that it mirrors? Is this a reality through which the media environment is teaching us how to separate hardware from software, that is, mind from body? This idea of labor (and its ethics or non-ethics) should

perhaps be conceptualized by keeping in mind that our way of coping with perception is governed by the software apparatus, rather than the hardware. The hardware is hidden, programmatically camouflaged; software dictates our perception of time passing, of wasted time, of inhabiting space, of virtualizing space ... Especially now, that there is no longer a clear separation between *online* and *offline*, between *public* and *private* in outward self-presentation, are we really aware of how much (and what kind of) labor lays underneath the interface we use to interact with the world around? How much of the actual labor is visible to us? How free are we to exercise our will when we try to put our cultural constructs in the context of a non-regulated information society? Economic pressure is just the external scenario; there may be an internal tyrannical counterpart that is embedded in the way we are forced to use more and more exact tools to measure and define our presence in the world, to shape it, to organize it, to present it to the others.

Dance (and post-dance) is a means of expression of the most material layer of being, so the body embeds such pressures live/alive in front of an audience, with no media in between. The labor is exposed, is obscene. But, is it entirely visible? Perhaps the only way to gain back a sort of control over our own means of expression is to question the creative process, using dancefloor as a new form of media environment, where the spectators are invited to bring their personal imagery.

Wrestling with the ways in which neoliberalism, or the post-fordist political ecology, has made use, instrumentalized the mechanics of artistic labor, Kunst introduces a problem not of form, but of framing: what remains of the immaterial, when it becomes a means of production? In this way, post-dance exists on the borders of what is possible, partly because it is only possible through its rejection of those structures (yet, it is, nevertheless, a project, a systematic unit of work, as Kunst argues). In post-dance, what is under question is not the form or history of dance, *per se*, but its possibility of criticality, emergence and rejection.

If the ways in which the contemporary is being articulated are changing, then post-dance is both precarious and self-serving; as Kunst articulates, there is a form of surplus value of contemporary economics that marks radical consumption at the core of contemporaneity. "The performer," she proposes, "becomes the ideal virtuoso worker of contemporary capitalism, producing communication through the means of communication." So, is, we wonder, post-dance a curatorial strategy that seeks to operate in parallel to this new form of labor, or is, the opposite, an approach that acknowledges the specificities of a mobile community of artists articulating their own modes of making, being or seeing?

Sergio Lo Gatto: I'm wondering: aren't we trying to deal with these topics as if Post-dance was a cross-national project? Isn't it stressing all a bit? Because Post-dance is actually a Swede project, with Swede kronor involved.

Diana Damian: that's what i mean yes
it's not just swedish though

look at the contributor list

Karl Svantesson: yes swedish but swedish tend to think they are very international (because they can afford paying)

Anette Pettersen: and write in english

Karl Svantesson: and paying is always global no?

Sergio Lo Gatto: so maybe certain issues could be solved if we accept to talk about Post-dance as a Swedish (and other countries') product, that justifies itself through some LOCAL policies

In her contribution to Pascal Gielen's *No Culture, No Europe*, Rosi Braidotti proposes that our contemporaneity is characterized by "multiple axes of mobility, circulation, flows of people and commodities." Speaking of a post-nationalist European space, Braidotti emphasizes the ways in which movement acts as both a representational paradigm through which we understand our own being in place, but also as a condition which creates its own subjectivisation. At the brink of a contradictory project of the European Union, we find ourselves asking, what comes after dance, because dance itself is what happens to us. This prompts another question: what does it mean to speak of what follows, when what follows is in the present? Can we talk about dance as a cosmopolitan project at a European level, when the labor that supports it constructs a particular kind of mobility, itself hinging on the specifics of a citizenship not yet defined, not quite continental, not quite politically active? What is then the relationship between familiarity across national contexts, and trans-national identities, for example, what is cosmopolitanism in a European context? How do questions of locality get propagated by white European discourse, which at the same time rejects its own differences?

Diana Damian: i don't know, local yes, swedish, no i think it's too tied to the nation-state and most of those people

Karl Svantesson: as opposite of cosmopolite, i love this contradiction

Sergio Lo Gatto: wait

Diana Damian: are nomadic

look at where spangberg goes

Sergio Lo Gatto: its supported by European Commission btw

Diana Damian: there you go

Karl Svantesson: but most of the money came from the long life burning project, I think

Diana Damian: look at how all of them have made careers and visibility working across countries

Karl Svantesson: taxmoney

Diana Damian: brexit haha (laughs alone)

Karl Svantesson: yes and in a way they do not cross upon each other any time in the book, they just move on, true academics:)

Anette Pettersen: (i can afford to laugh with you)

Diana Damian: (<3)

yes but it is true that this is a kind of privilege that is maybe not acknowledged

what do you do with that though?

spangberg is very aware of this i guess

fuck you, post dance, love you

We might be invited to think through the form of this outcome. Many artists, throughout time, have been trying to propose a fracture (in choreographic language) just by *doing* something new, or controversial, or non conventional, without necessarily involving a written manifesto. *Post-dance* is authored by a group of scholars, philosophers, thinkers and artists. The whole attempt to theorization passes through a very hulking *filter*: writing, *logos*. We might say that one of the strongest and clearest aims of this outcome is to create a sort of (multiple, sometimes ambiguous) context, as the authors were trying to build a fortress around the very concept of "post-dance." On the other hand, how is newness, or difference, captured if not in polyvocality, without a contention to its historical contingent, but nevertheless a rejection of something too? Or, maybe, there is a kind of conceptualizing through doing occurring in the movement away from choreography that the book performs.

Karl Svantesson: that's what I love about us that we do not even have a tail 😊

Sergio Lo Gatto: come cazzo si dice??? CHE SI CONSERVANO AL MEGLIO IN SE STESSI

hahahah

Karl Svantesson: but we have each other and we have language

Sergio Lo Gatto: seems to me that all these questions some ways affect the very content of the book. Because they convey a (not totally clear) political act

Diana Damian: but we don't know how to be in the same place in the same room and do this without our own mobility

Diana Damian: we're trying to have each other

Karl Svantesson: so togetherness needs trying and trying needs language

Karl Svantesson: YESSERGIO

Diana Damian: yes Karl

Sergio Lo Gatto: yes Diana

Karl Svantesson: I think they are trying to create a new artform (as we do) but not the same

Sergio Lo Gatto: yes, but not the same

😊

We might be obliged to consider how thick this layer of *logos* is, how important is the search for the right words, the editing process, the choices on the overall structure of the book. A book is a very complex media object that tends to hold a part of control over the meaning of the very words it displays. Written language is a structure (and we are reading something that was translated/transformed into one major language- English). Every form of theory is conveyed by this structure. This experiment of ours is a kind of battle for a new structure, a river that tries to overflow the banks that a general convention had dug for it. But the strongest difference is in the form of this collective nature, it's a different strategy for the same battle. Our written code (that levels up or down to a shared language, English) re-enacts the very modes of communication that are active inside our group of four, while *Post-dance* juxtaposes a list of texts that are in fact as different as the theoretical sparks can be. We may talk about a double structure, two layers intertwined: a micro structure and a macro structure. The micro is the single article, made of all the paths that lead to a specific sort of knowledge; the macro is the book that drives all these paths to the same direction: the term post-dance and its implications. The basic code, then, is perhaps inscribed not by the writer, but by the reader. It's not about the way one writes (not only), but the way the other reads.

Diana Damian: and we have never been able to articulate our discourse in a singular way
which is a good thing perhaps
chasing the tail

Karl Svantesson: and they say they share the passion for dance, that's what makes them do
this

Sergio Lo Gatto: by the way, I think we should put all these things in the list: sharing
problems; is post-dance an attempt to an artform?

Diana Damian: ok but as Anette pointed out, it is called post-dance
the dash is important, no?
i don't want us to write about someone else's project in that way though

Karl Svantesson: sorry

Diana Damian: because that's then criticism again having a cigarette on the side
<3 @Karl
and we're smoking up the stage
but i love the idea of sharing problems

Karl Svantesson: so what does post-dance mean for us, the term post for instance are we all
clear on this one?

Sergio Lo Gatto: @Diana, what would be the way out of the smoking corner?

Diana Damian: thinking not always in response
sometimes ahead

Sergio Lo Gatto: loveya

Diana Damian: without the specificity of the role always tagging behind

Sergio Lo Gatto: yes yes

Karl Svantesson: nemo

Sergio Lo Gatto: first of all, in this case, we are READERS.
even before being critics

Diana Damian: yes, not evaluators

Sergio Lo Gatto: yes yes

Karl Svantesson: and as readers we have an ethical standpoint that we always try to defend
often without knowing what we defend

Diana Damian: send photos
notes
letters
love
from rome

Sergio Lo Gatto: love

This is visible in the poetics of the text itself.

Karl Svantesson has left.
Diana Damian has left.
Anette Pettersen has left.
Sergio Lo Gatto has left.

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****Writingshop*** is a long-term collaborative project between four European writers examining the processes and politics of contemporary criticism in the backdrop of shifting performance and dance ecologies and conflictual political climates.

Writingshop emerged as a result of the EU funded project SPACE/Writers on the Move. The project has taken the form of residencies, workshops, conversations, collaborative writing and research-led intensives in Berlin, Bergen, Bruxelles, Dro, Stockholm, Prague, Kristiansand and London. The collective engages in ongoing collaborative publishing, public talks and workshops as well as artistic projects. Writingshop are Diana Damian Martin (Romania/UK), Sergio Lo Gatto (Italy), Anette Therese Pettersen (Norway), Karl Svantesson (Sweden).

