Both the identity of dance and that of theory are at risk as soon as the two intertwine. This anthology collects observations by choreographers and scholars, dancers, dramaturges and dance theorists in an effort to trace the multiple ways in which dance and theory correlate and redefine each other. The contributions examine which concepts, interdependencies and discontinuities of dance and theory are relevant today and promise to engage us in the future. They address crucial topics of the current debate in dance and performance studies such as artistic research, aesthetics, politics, visuality, archives, and the »next generation«.

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“We don’t have theories of dance in Thailand.” These words were spoken by a scholar of arts and performance from Bangkok, who is very familiar with western philosophy, theory and aesthetics. In saying this, he sought to characterise the relationship between traditional Thai dance and contemporary forms of dance and performance in this age of cultural globalisation. By way of explanation, he added, “Yes… we have theory, but we don’t present theories in a discursive way. We present them embedded within the work of art, within performance.”

With his interpretation, the scholar from Bangkok illustrated the fact that the relationship between dance and theory is culturally framed, and may refer to a different historical reality in the modern West than in other cultural spheres. He also points out that not only does modern Western thinking about dance and theory perhaps tend to exert a claim to universality, but may also be connected to mechanisms of colonizing the Other. Within a colonizing framework, theory promotes strategies of ‘othering’ and, of course, has the power of ‘othering.’ This also means that theory itself may act as a colonizing practice – of art, of the body, and of movement. Hence, for example, the topos of the non-discursivity of body and movement, which marks the body and movement as ‘The Other.’

These remarks underline certain aesthetic, political and social aspects of the ambiguous relationship between dance and theory, thus implicitly asking, how is theory – in different historical, cultural and aesthetic modes – inscribed in dance? Which borders, transfers, zigzags within the fields of practice/performance and theory are parts of the contemporary discourse in and around dance? How did this discourse change?

There was a time, and there were situations, when a certain ‘unease,’ or even a Resistance to Theory (Man 1986) was in the air. Early in the era of modern dance, Mary Wigman stated that dance and talking about dance have nothing to do with each other. She nonetheless wrote a book whose very title explored the relationship between language and movement, and which conceded that dance and language are not mutually exclusive: The Language of Dance (Wigman 1966). During the same period, theories of dance were emerging which have had a major influence on the history and aesthetics of dance, for example the spatial theory and choreutics of Rudolf von Laban (1966), who is remembered as the philosopher of Expressionist Dance. Many dancers and choreographers of west-
ern modern dance propagated, far more energetically than artists from other artistic disciplines, a clear division between dance and theory, and between practice and discourse.

Almost 100 years later, we can ask, “who today is afraid of theory?” Why is theory playing an increasingly important role for contemporary choreographers and in university courses in dance, choreography and performance? And conversely, why are so many practice-oriented programs of study in performance and dance being set up at universities in the German-speaking world, mirroring the trend in Great Britain and the USA? Why have so many art colleges been granted university status? Why is the issue of ‘artistic research’ discussed in such fervent and contentious terms, both by artists and academics?

In the history of dance, the relationship between practice and theory is something of a liaison dangereuse. Indeed, in the modern West, the relationship between dance and theory is complex and defies easy characterisation. As, through, in, out of, against, before, after, or, between – these and a multitude of other local, temporal, causal or modal prepositions may be employed to denote the complex patterns of relationship between dance and theory. The relational structure appears haphazard or at least without clear boundaries. How are we to re-think – and re-perform – a relationship that is by no means clear, and resists clear-cut definitions? Which idea of dance do we embrace? Which concept and tradition of theory? What kind of relationship, interaction, exchange is this liaison dangereuse?

The multiplicity of exchanges and transmissions between dance and theory leads us to the issue of the historicisation and archiving of dance. Michel Foucault grasped the nature of this problem when he quoted Jorge Luis Borges in his introduction to Les Mots et les Choses (The Order of Things, Foucault 1971). On the issue of creating categories and taxonomies, Borges refers to an old Chinese encyclopaedia. According to this epistemology, the ‘order’ of naming and arranging animals within a ‘system’ is as follows: There are animals that

“(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush [...]” (Foucault 1971: xv)

and so on. All of these groups of animals represent ‘classes’ within the system of this encyclopaedia, but what is the order of these bizarre categories? What is the significance of employing this taxonomy? It marks, according to Foucault, a borderline to ‘our’ way of thinking. Though such funny juxtapositions as those described above may not emerge from the various constellations of dance and theory, the approach pursued by this book represents an experiment of sorts. It tries to re-imagine the possibilities of order and disorder, of relations and perhaps false juxtapositions within historical or established cultural categories of dance and theory. Perhaps these constellations have a unique fascination of their own.
This anthology is a contribution to the on-going process of de- and re-thinking questions of dance and theory. The prepositions symbolise the complex juxtaposition of dance and theory. We understand these prepositions on the one hand as ‘pre-positions,’ indicating questions of de-positioning and re-positioning, order and dis-order, placement and dis-placement. On the other hand, the term ‘pre-position’ also describes a material, physical process of shifting or dislocation. This process is connected to a crisis, which entails an intermediate and undefined space. This crisis may involve risks but may also be thoroughly productive.

In *Les Mots et les Choses*, Foucault deals with the ‘crisis of representation.’ When we apply his ideas to the context of dance and theory, this raises the question of whether and how theory and practice are related to a crisis of categorisation in the contemporary context of a deregulated world. But what is the relationship between this fluidity of terminology and a deregulated – or more specifically, neoliberal and post-Fordian – world? ‘How,’ in this political and socio-economic context, can concepts of theory and practice in dance and choreography be conceived and realised? Is a theory of practice or, as the case may be, a practice of theory, even possible? How can dance – as theory of practice and/or practice of theory – be placed within the tradition of an aesthetically grounded (postcolonial) critique of the Enlightenment, a critique of rationality, technology, science at universities without constructing binarities, and without marking dance as the Other of modernism, thereby both marginalising and enhancing its standing?

This book is the result of an international congress on Dance [and] Theory that was held in April 2011 at the Uferstudios in Berlin with the financial support of the Centre for Movement Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin and the German Research Foundation (DFG). As the organisers of this congress, we wanted to devise an approach that deviated from the typical format of international conferences: a series of lectures presenting individual research findings. Analogous to the developments in contemporary choreography and performance in relation to collaboration, process orientation, temporality, performativity and critique of representation, the aim of the congress was to provide an ‘open’ format that would not only reflect the relationship between dance theory and practice in a variety of ways, but would also construe these practical and theoretical reflections and de-positionings over the course of the congress as a collaborative process. To this end, we initiated a workshop one year prior to the congress, which was designed to open up a broad field of thought, to pose new questions and to develop flexible structures and open systems.

The result was a congress that consisted of an ensemble of panels, lecture performances and keynote speeches. Those invited to participate were from international artistic and academics fields. The themes discussed by the panels covered artistic research, aesthetics, politics, visuality, archives, and the next generation of key topics in dance and performance research.

In preparing for the congress, the panel moderators initiated discussions within their panels weeks and months previously, writing position papers and
developing questions and hypotheses. We would like to thank the panel moderators Beatrice von Bismarck, Bettina Brandl-Risi, Susanne Foellmer, Sibylle Peters, Kerstin Evert, André Lepecki and Gerald Siegmund for their intensive involvement. Most of the panel respondents only entered the discussions during the congress, and took the trouble to formulate a more or less spontaneous response to the discussions in the various panels.

The discussion process was sustained and carried forward in the book. The panel moderators revised the introductory papers, which they had presented at the congress discussions. These were distributed to all panel participants and provided the basis for their own elaborations. The respondents, for their part, received all of the revised panel texts and used these together with the congress discussions to formulate their responses.

The panels included in the book by no means claim to cover the entire thematic spectrum of contemporary debate on dance studies and choreography. Nonetheless, we hope that this book, which presents a collaborative array of issues and fields of discourse, offers readers a variety of positions and approaches, forms of presentation and ways of thinking. We hope it can be both an inventory and a platform for productive and combative further development of possible relationships between dance and theory.

An anthology, particularly one produced as this one has been, is based on a collaborative process. That is why we would like begin by thanking all panel moderators, respondents and panel participants for their productive and intensive cooperation. We also wish to heartily thank the Berlin team who organised the congress and ran the congress office at Uferstudios: Daniela Hahn, Kai van Eikels, Ann-Kathrin Reimers and Inka Paul.

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