

Andrea Keiz

Situation and Form:

Approaches to Video Documentation

Originally a biologist and teacher for dance improvisation, Andrea Keiz discovered contact improvisation – and the video camera. As a Berlin-based artist, she has documented contemporary dance in the city for more than a decade and helped to develop the database of MIME Centrum Berlin. She teaches the use of video documentation in artistic processes at the Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin (HZT), at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts and at various festivals. In her essay, she describes different situations in and approaches to documentation – drawing from her practical experience in the field.

What does it mean to *document* something with a video camera? Often the term *documentation* is merely used to describe the act of recording a live performance. Yet documentation can be a lot more – and pursue various goals.

Documentation in the Theater and on Stage

From 2000 until January 2011, I was given the chance to fully document the contemporary dance scene in Berlin on video on behalf of the Mime Centrum Berlin. Security regulations and the fact that I filmed during performances in which the audience was present strongly influenced the standard that I subsequently developed for myself. I attended technical and general rehearsals in advance in order to then follow the action on stage during recording by using pan shots and zoom. The idea was to capture the dramaturgical flow of the piece without losing sight of the overall spatial situation. How much detail is possible in order to converge on the dance? And to what degree do I need to gain an overview of the action in order to do justice to the visual representation of a live event?

As the person behind the camera, I determine the composition of the image and the movements of the camera. Decisions must be made in correspondence with lighting and aperture, individual and group movements, movement dynamics, etc. For me, this is the moment in my work in which improvisation techniques come into play: keeping an eye on the overall action, while making specific split-second choices and exploiting the next possible opportunity after I've made a "wrong decision".

Although the format described above suggests a certain degree of neutrality, I soon came to realize that there is no such thing as an objective outside eye. Nevertheless, it should be possible for an experienced observer to gain an overview of the performance. The difference between live performance and video recording of the type described above is genre immanent and can only be compensated by personal experience.

Documentation of Processes

Compared to recording a performance on stage, video documentation of a process opens up many new possibilities: the acts of participating and reflecting allow for a much more extensive form of representing events. The result is a pool of visual information, which – augmented by text and sound – can help the viewer to understand the documented material better. Because the documenter has the chance to gain insight in the project over a longer period of time, he or she is better able to grasp the intention of a production and select camera angle, as well as define degree of involvement with the action and distance from it accordingly. Examples of such work can be seen in the videos *Einblicke I and II*, which give a good impression of the initial founding phase of the Inter-University Centre for Dance Berlin. (<http://www.hzt-berlin.de/?z=7&sz=2&lan=de&g=237662>)

As I understand it, the relationship between filmmaker and the persons being filmed, between the people and the apparatus, is mainly based on communication and dialog. I know communication changes when a video camera is present. I therefore attempt to bring the camera into the dialogue as an extension of my body. Just because I have hands doesn't mean that I constantly have to use them to touch someone and likewise, I don't need to constantly shove the camera between the protagonists and myself. I remain a dialog partner in a triangle that includes me, my dialogue partner, and the video camera and thereby also retain my own status as an independent subject.

Video Projects in the Field of Education

“How do I visualize something?” In order to raise the awareness of participants for this issue in a practical way, I hand over parts of the work in pedagogical projects to the group. This ranges from the development of a concept to discussions about how to present oneself and what aesthetics to use, as well as involving them in camera work and editing. How do I want others to see me? The group is encouraged to negotiate questions of representation by itself. I merely influence the decisions being made by giving input and asking specific questions. I also actively accompany the project with the camera, in other words I stay involved in the process.

One example of this kind of work is the film *Reflexx oder pädagogisch genug*, which I produced in 2004 with the youth club “Rocis” of the Symphony Orchestra Berlin. The teenagers wanted to produce a video for an anniversary celebration. Together we discussed what exactly they wanted to communicate and how to best combine interviews with images set to music and their own self-presentation. Aside from the ideas that they developed and partially also filmed themselves, the discussions and the planning process also became parts of the film. In other words: personal scenes repeatedly punctuate the documentary material. In such cases, I do not interfere with the aesthetic that the participants have chosen. I merely ask questions in order to continuously adjust the imagined image with the result in the video.

Video Documentation as Workshop

The perspective taken on an event always depends on a documenter's point of view. Based on this idea, I have developed a workshop format, in which workshop participants document performances or similar events with my help. In other words: the participants choose, for example, one of the workshops being offered during a festival and form small teams of 2-3 people. Working in a team ensures that the documentary goal has to be articulated and that a productive dialogue ensues. I encourage the crews to profit from their interest in and personal affinity for a workshop and to find a personal approach to the work that they are documenting. During daily meetings, I give feedback and suggestions concerning the material filmed so far and answer questions that have come up.

At the 3. Dance Education Biennale in Frankfurt, for example, the timeframe was short, but the daily workshop program substantial. Isolating the core of one's own interest in a project out of a wealth of information is a process that everyone has to do by him- or herself. For me personally, it was interesting to again see confirmed how strong daily visual information influences our visual education. The process of disengaging oneself from the permanent reproduction of accustomed images takes a long time. On the fourth and last day of the Biennale, it was possible to discern how individual workshops were treated in distinct ways that reflected their respective specificity: in the contact improvisation workshop by Nancy Stark Smith, the participants used a moving camera extensively, while the chosen visual concept for the classical Bournonville partnering class largely involved stills – produced with a photo camera.

In contrast, during a workshop held at the Frankfurt Summer Lab 2008, it was possible over a period of 10 days to develop individual forms of documentation that reflected the situation in each seminar, even down to the individual concept behind the editing. The most surprising result of this process was the documentation of a workshop by João Fiadeiro and Janez Janša, whose struggles during the workshop translated in the video documentation into conspicuously tense images. The documentation of silence, of the tension in the bodies – learning to read the way in which desire to solve a situation inscribes itself in the constellations of bodies. Such things require time in order to allow the documenter to sufficient involve himself/herself in the process, but then also step out of it again. The possibility to experience the process first-hand, gave the students the chance to immerse themselves so deeply in the material and its specificity over ten days that they could take their knowledge with them into the documentation.

Documentation as Artistic Research

Currently, I am interested in exploring documentation as a distinct artistic practice. In 2012, I had several opportunities to conduct experiments in various settings both with students, as well as with performing artists. In order to examine questions of documentation both in a practical as well as artistic way, I provided the participants with a photo camera, audio recording devices, paper, writing materials and crayons, in addition to a video camera. A short, performance sequence was repeated several times. The first time, participants should just watch, the second time document and the third time revise or modify their documents. Giving participants a second chance at

documentation allowed them to question whether they chose the “correct” instrument the first time around and whether their idea of what was to be documented really fulfilled itself.

This setting is based on my belief that dance as an art form cannot be described in its entirety by a single medium alone. Photo material, moving images, interviews and notations of all kinds provide a container of documents, which are able to make statements about dance as containers of knowledge. In doing so, they may strongly diverge from the visual representation of a performance and thus also fail to substitute it. However, they involve others senses and say something about the dance or the performance, which goes beyond simple representation. Thus they enable new visions of a documentary approach to dance that also provide us with the chance to regard and utilize documentation as a source of inspiration for our own artistic work.

In a workshop for the masters program Contemporary Dance Pedagogy (ztp) at the Frankfurt University for Music and Performing Art, I presented participants with a five-minute performative structure that contained movement, images and language. The students were given the chance to choose a means of documentation. In a second round, they were asked to select a different form of documentation or to elaborate the one already chosen. As the students approached the action without inhibition using photo cameras, video cameras and audio recordings tools, they themselves became part of the ‘performance’. With each new round, their reflection of how and what they were observing as well of their choice of means, increased – simultaneously generating new ideas for creative work.

Joa Hug, a dancer-performer in the Artistic Research Lab associated with Tanzfabrik Berlin, formulated the following words after a lab in March 2012:

“Documentation can reveal and make intelligible that which was implicit to the maker or conceiver of the performance. It can be creative, inventive, performative; it doesn’t need to aspire to be faithful to representing that which is actually there, but it can enter the realm of the virtual. The act of documenting is always an act of changing, maybe even transforming the documented; maybe it is precisely this that is the task of the documenter: to enter the work, but then to create his or her own piece (artistic research as documentation). This need not be a violation of the creator’s original intention (although it can feel like that), but it can be perceived as an act of collaboration in which the unconscious or unthought-of in a work is brought to the fore and made sensible and perceivable.”

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