

TREACHEROUS MOVEMENT

Andressa Miyazato

Before the performance took place, I discovered a spot beneath the foyer where I could quietly perform my ritual of connecting with myself and put on my costume. Once ready, I went upstairs and found an elevator on my left. My hands reached out searching for it, as if I were walking in the dark. I turned my head away from my hand, trying to “listen” through the touch—I turned my gaze inwards anticipating the next movements. Led by my hands, parts of my body successively approached the surface of the elevator. In a vertical dance, the elevator glided over my skin: it was cold. Movements were fluid. As my sweaty skin encountered resistance during this movement, I had a few options: simply give up to the movement and continue to offer the elevator parts of my body covered in fabric; or insist on rubbing against the metal surface until the friction would reverberate throughout my body. Shaking. After a while, my skin was irritated and red; the elevator was covered with drops of sweat and my fingerprints spread all over the place. As I explored the spaces around it, my costume—designed by Magdalena Neuburger—featured magnetic elements that unexpectedly adhered to the elevator’s metal surface. As I moved away from it—while trapped by the magnets—the fabric of my costume stretched. A series of movements were unleashed to assess its limits, before a possible break or detachment of the magnet could succeed.

There was another staircase on the other side. I began to climb it on my knees. When I reached a few steps up, I let go of the weight of my body and let myself fall, allowing gravity to do its work. First slow—without any extra impulse—gradually adding speed.

Body rolled down in a horizontal dance. I got back up on my knees and tears rolled down my face. I climbed up and rolled down passing through crumbling stone waterfall a dead body a melting body.

The ground had no choice but to accept the impact of my body, even though, through dance techniques, I tried to absorb it. The techniques protected me from accidents, but I felt disconnected,

as technique became an obstacle. To reconcile both approaches to the ground, I recalled the *falling* notion of the Japanese Butoh dancer Ohno Kazuo (1906-2010), who believed that “[...] the floor doesn’t represent an impermeable surface; it never acts as a barrier.” When Ohno “[...] drops to the floor, one has the impression that he’s embarking on a limitless free fall, continuing to tumble further and further into the depths of the universe” (Ohno 2004, 45). A little more impulse: then I am able to accelerate my descent until I reach the glass door that separated the room where the conferees were waiting for the performance to start. Still sitting on the floor, behind the glass door I could watch the conferees and the things around merging with my own reflected image.

After a while, without realizing that I was already in a performative state, an organizer approached me to ask if I was ready to start my presentation: a moment of confusion. Of course, I had not told the organization how I was going to begin my performance. The decision to explore the space beforehand was spontaneous, but what I find interesting about this confusion was that, for a moment, it put things back in their usual place. As in theater, when the third signal is heard, the audience settles in, the lights go down, the show begins. These interactions, however awkward, became part of the performance. I moved on and crossed the glass door, I moved on my knees towards the conferees in movements charged with emotion. From that moment on I was being *watched*.

My entire body requires to be activated, as there is no physical separation between the conferees and myself. By doing so, I was not only able to connect with everything around me, but I also had the feeling that I was no longer the center from where the movements originated. The dance was already there: in the foyer of the NIG.

Practice: Lie down on the floor—inhale, exhale—and take some time observing the ceiling, until you feel observed by it. Then try to literally hug it as if you wanted to hug the whole ceiling. Repeat this movement a few times without losing focus on the ceiling. Hug the ceiling with different parts of your body. Then feel the floor beneath you, inhale, exhale, and feel how the floor supports the weight of your body. Imagine yourself being embraced by the Earth’s inner core, the ceiling, the sky, and the stars.

I played songs arranged by the composer Rafael Merlo that evoked my emotional memories through a small speaker. The music was intermittently interrupted by the ambient sounds coming mainly from the vending machine. The conferees were silent. Everybody was wearing masks because of COVID-19 regulations.

During the performance, the conferees, the foyer, and I, had *silence* in common.

My costume had an overlapping part, made of scraps of fabric and assembled in fragments. They were held together by magnets. Sometimes part of it would come off—resembling hanging pieces of skin—or it would fall to the floor—like a piece of meat. Once on the floor, I wrapped it in paper and held it in my arms. In my mind I chant a mantra. An image from my childhood

→ Fig. 1
Dancer Andressa Miyazato,
*Verräterische Bewegung (Traacherous
Movement)*, 2021, performance
at the conference *De/Colonising
Knowledge* (2021), The New Institute
Building (NIG), Vienna. Photo:
Marisel Bongola.

in São José do Rio Preto crossed my mind—I'm wearing flip-flops, going to buy meat for my mother at the butcher's, repeating her request over and over in my head. (Fig. 1)



Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in a new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape “knowing,” I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. “Knowing” is painful because after “it” happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before (Anzaldúa 2012, 70).

Anzaldúa’s words strongly resonate with my approach to dance, my experiences as a practitioner and dance teacher have taught me that improvisation allows dancers to explore the internal and external spaces of the body. To stop judging the actions in the moment, enabling the dancer to be surprised by the movements and sensations that subsequently generate new actions. I have observed that dancers often rely on body memory and a repertoire of dance techniques to make instantaneous choices during an improvisation session. In other words, it seems that it is through what is familiar to the body that we can venture into the unknown. We can rescue what we already know, but which has been forgotten, erased, and silenced—what was once familiar is now dormant or has been suffocated—moving my hips became unbearable. Like having an alien in my body.

My approach to dance is a “crossing over”, *una travesía*, because to make sense of myself and the world I need to be dancing. For me, dance not always means movement and presence. It can also be the absence of both. The questions here, though, are who/what is present and who/what has disappeared and why? Who/what motivates me to move or who/what has the power to limit how far I can reach with my movements?

In the case of my *travesía*, “crossing over”, the goal is not to show the result of a rehearsed choreography, rather, if the goal was indeed to *show* anything, it was about shedding light, in the

The New Institute Building (NIG) of the University of Vienna is an architectural landmark that was inaugurated in 1962 as the first major university building constructed after the Second World War, with nine floors covering an area of 21,500 m². The NIG currently houses six institutes, which include Cultural and Social Anthropology, Educational Sciences, Geography and Area Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, as well as Economic and Educational Psychology, and Evaluation (Posch 2017).

present moment, on the process of making sense of what the unfolding improvisation had to say to all of us sharing that moment in the foyer. If “improvisation in movement is a discovery process that uncovers deeper structures of meaning”, (Sheets-Johnstone in Serlin 2013, 8) then the process of making sense of this performance also reveals something about proprioception, along with the sense of axis and balance that a dancer is trained in and must control. Curiously, my feeling is that each encounter with the corners of the foyer tells me something about myself: the size of my body, my relation to space, even my mortality. Feelings like pieces of skin that still hang on my body and can’t be torn off at once—the scar can be bigger—and still not enough to help me occupy all that space within my body. When I dance, I take up more space than I think I’m allowed to or trained for. My various selves, movement traces, emotional residues, fingerprints, drops of sweat spread out over the surfaces, in intervals. When I dance, I am vulnerable and that’s exactly what empowers me.

Practice: Put on your favorite music and create a space in your house to dance. Start with your eyes closed. When you open them, imagine yourself entering this space for the first time. Turn off the music. Then, observe your breathing and walk around the room, feeling the ground under your feet. Remember, food grows from the ground. The floor is permeable. Explore the surfaces of the furniture and walls with your hands and different parts of your body, always being very careful. Try fitting your body into different spaces in the room. It could just be a part of your body. Visit a corner of the room where you’ve never been before. Stay there for a moment. Lean against the wall off-balance, as if it wasn’t there, and you might fall. Pay attention to the thoughts and feelings that arise. Record them on separate pieces of paper, spread them out on the floor, and try to dance according to the ideas written on the paper. Reverse them, elongate them, multiply them, or simply contemplate them. If you find a spot in the room that triggers a childhood memory, absorb that feeling and contemplate it until it transforms into something else. Your room is communicating with you, showing you what to do. The dance was already there. Take a photo of the parts of the room that triggered a specific memory. Write a love letter to this image. Combine the photo with the letter. Dance again.

The performance *Treacherous Movement* took place during the conference *De/Colonizing Knowledge* in the foyer of the New Institute Building (Neues Institutsgebäude, NIG) in November 2021.

A dance performance in such a space would at least seem misplaced.

The piece was originally conceived as a conventional dance performance in which the venue plays no role. However, it took on an unexpected dimension when I encountered the foyer of the university. As a result, this contribution, is a reflection on the decolonization of knowledge through dance, becoming in itself an extension of the dance performance—a *travesía*. Gloria Anzaldúa’s

concept of *travesía* is elaborated in the context of a specific geographical location on the border between the United States and Mexico, which she refers to as an open wound where the “Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 2012, 25). Thus, *travesía* not only refers to geographical borders or crossings but also to internal movements of “making sense”, in her own words: “Every time she makes ‘sense’ of something, she has to ‘crossover,’ kicking a hole out of the boundaries of the self and slipping under or over, dragging the old skin along, stumbling over it. It hampers her movement in the new territory, dragging the ghost of the past with her” (Anzaldúa 2012, 71).

Treacherous, because my movements disturbed the fixed meanings of things from the seemingly neutral building, they provoked reactions —*treacherous movements*. Treacherous, dancing off-balance, constantly shifting the weight by sharing the center, dealing with slippages, impulses, attraction, resistance, and friction.

The notion of “center” took on another meaning beyond the core of the body and the axis that the dancer is trained to control. Yet it also served me to trace the historical moment when the locations of dance steps were erased “[...] in order to place all dancing on the plane of pure geometry where each dance’s specificities could be compared and evaluated” (Foster 2011, 45). According to Foster, the historical moment can be traced back to the 1700s when Feuillet’s system of dance notation, along with efforts by other ballet masters, aimed to fulfill Louis XIV’s directive to develop methods for representing dance through written notation (Foster 2011, 38–39). Foster pointed out that Feuillet’s notation system “not only supported the notion of a centrality that extends itself outwards in space towards a periphery, but it also reinforced a bodily experience of having a center that extends into and moves through an unmarked space” (Foster 2011, 45). Despite my performance being based on improvisation, which relied on spontaneous associations with the space, neither I nor the foyer of the University of Vienna were neutral; both of us were entities embedded in our respective local histories and trajectories.

Dancing in the university foyer evoked memories of my initial encounter with dance, which also began in an unconventional setting—the schoolyard where we practiced within a social project. Dance, at that time, was essential for me to navigate through realities and narratives that were often contradictory. Therefore, my improvisation in the foyer of the University of Vienna, experienced as a *travesía*, enabled me to trace the emotional residues in my dancing body. It allowed me to know something not only about dance but *through* dance. This experience made me conscious of me being crossed by the poly-temporalities of a dance that *happened* not only during the performance in question, but even before—many generations before me—continuing to resonate in my movements. (Fig. 2)



→ Fig. 2-4
Dancer Andressa Miyazato,
Treacherous Movement, 2021,
performance at the conference *De/
Colonizing Knowledge* (2021),
The New Institute Building (NIG),
Vienna. Photo: Marisel Bongola.



→ Fig. 5:

Dancer Andressa Miyazato, *Treacherous Movement*, 2021), performance at the conference *De/Colonizing Knowledge* (2021), The New Institute Building (NIG), Vienna. Photo: Marisel Bongola.

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