

## The presentation of `nature´ in and through dance

In the following essay I will explore in what way nature<sup>1</sup> is represented, both in and together with dance. It seemed to be a barely theoretically researched area, although looking into the field of dance, there are many opportunities to either participate in dance workshops in `nature´ or to dance earth, wind and fire – as metaphors for `nature´. We can deduce from a huge amount of offers (e.g. in the Internet), that there has to be a lot of demand and therefore a need. So the first question to follow would be why there seems to be a need for dancing in `nature´. A question I will not treat as a core one, but which probably will be answered as an outcome of this essay.

Aside from the participation in these kinds of workshops, we can find dance performances which have naturalistic sounding names or themes or that are dealing with issues of `nature´. But what is `nature´? Why does the representation of `nature´ stand out from other themes treated in dance? What kinds of implications are associated with the presentation of `nature´ in and through dance?

In order to answer these questions I chose two dance pieces in which `nature´ is a core element. One is "Land" performed by Eiko and Koma and the other is the trailer of Anna Halprins film "Returning home – Moving with the Earth Body"<sup>2</sup>. I also chose these performers, because their emphasis lies on the inclusion of `nature´ into dance - either through performances or through workshops.

After describing short excerpts, I will give some biographical notes about the performers which help to embed the excerpts into a larger context of their work.

Then I will explain why I think that the use of `nature´ in dance can be regarded as a ritualistic element in these dance pieces. A short discourse analysis of `nature´ explains why `nature´ is a discourse and not an objective thing or place. It places the use of `nature´ in these dance performances in a larger context of cultural reproduction and hegemonic structures. In analysing cultural performances and rituals, anthropologists and ethnographers looked for reflections of cultural imperatives and behaviours, regarding performances as

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<sup>1</sup> As there are many possible understandings of nature as e.g. the nature of dance, I refer to what we understand under our natural environment filled with plants and animals, rivers and mountains, although there might be as well different understandings of what characterizes `nature´. To express the discourse of nature, I will put it into inverted comma.

<sup>2</sup> Although my two main study-subjects are from different cultural backgrounds, I will not focus on describing the differences in their perception and representation of `nature´ in their dance piece as it would drift the attention from my main question.

mini-cultural ensembles (McKenzie, 2001, Schechner, 1993). Therefore it is necessary to analyze the presentation of `nature´ in the two examples as a) reference points of the philosophical beliefs of the performers and b) expression of contemporary needs, anxieties and dangers. These performances can be seen as a presentation of certain discourses and practices, which are framed in a socio-historical belief-system. Only through unfolding the different layers, can we understand the subconscious power which is decoded in performances in general, but especially in these kinds of ritualistic performances.

Before starting, I want to emphasize that I am not questioning the positive and relaxing effect `nature´ can have on people working in cities, because that is well researched area.

### **Eiko and Koma: "Land"**

First I want to quote some very meaningful parts of the interview with Eiko, Koma and the musicians about the piece "Land" (Rosenberg, 1995: videotape). Koma stated that they had the idea for the piece during a dry summer. However, seeing some flowers next to the river, she remembered being taught in Japan and how much work each tree had to do in order to bloom. The drummer Reynaldo Lujan acknowledges the piece to have opened his eyes about the land itself and his work as a farmer.

Eiko: "...Mountain, tree, flower, they know they are beautiful. They never create that beauty by themselves. That beauty they inherit it from their ancestors...", fits together with Koma: "...Coming from Japan, we are taught to think about our ancestors. ...I really think about not necessarily my own ancestors, but much older times, longer times...in that I feel very fortunate..." This gives us an insight about their view of the origins of life and we can get a sense of what we seem to have lost: an inherited knowledge. We might be able to recover in much the same way as Koma did whilst she produced this piece and found her connection with her ancestors- mankind itself.

I will now describe two parts of the piece. The piece starts with Eiko and Koma moving very slowly on the floor, whilst a flute is playing a melody and a drum is representing a heartbeat. Eiko and Koma are rolling over each other over the floor, which seems to be covered with bits of dry leaves, in very slow motion. Their focus is inside themselves. They are both covered with a piece of cloth around their pelvis, their bodies seem to be painted white. This suggests their connection to the earth, but also the relationship between `men´ and the world, where `man´ is just a small thing and highly fragile and dependant on the world. That sequence goes on for a long time. Then the drumbeats stop, but the flute continues,

while a child appears on the stage, standing there and looking into the sky. The child standing and looking into the sky, focusing inside, contrasts sharply with the two adults rolling over the floor. The child instead can be interpreted as a sign for an optimistic view into the future, standing upright looking into the sky, as symbolic of the future. In the second part towards the end of the piece, the struggle for survival is presented, the demonstration of the power of `nature´ of life and death reinforced through fast drumbeats followed by silence. We see Koma lying on the ground as though she was dead, Eiko slowly approaching her, the front leg bent very deeply, when the child appears from the background. The child crosses the stage very slowly, not paying attention to the adults who by then are both sinking down onto the floor – at the end of their lives, whilst the child´s path continues. This is symbolic of a happy ending, where life goes on and on, no matter what happens.

The story of this performance can be seen as a realistic presentation of what human life has always and will always be, although outer circumstances are continuously changing. Nevertheless the struggle for survival against the power of `nature´ seems to be taken from long ago in the past, as well as the presented construction of a family is a very traditional one, and I am - as an audience-member - left alone thinking about what is stated with that performance: The desire to go back to the past, where everything was fine? Just a memory? A story from Japan? A futuristic image of what will be if we continue to exploit our planet? There are different possible interpretations, however they are all creating specific images about society. I will return to this interesting analysis after I have described parts of Anna Halprins last dance film.

### **Anna Halprin “Returning home – Moving with the Earth Body”<sup>3</sup>**

This is a short film on the treatise of death, where images of `nature´ (e.g. birds, forests, sunsets) are interwoven with images of Halprin in `nature´. In one image we see her wrapped in web-like cloth rolling in and being rolled from the waves in the sea. In another image - her body is painted blue and she is covered by branches and leaves. Then we see her sitting on the ruin of a house, taking bits of broken clay-pots in her hands and stroking

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<sup>3</sup>The excerpts I will describe are only taken from the trailer ([www.openeyepictures.com/returninghome/rh\\_reviews\\_full.htm](http://www.openeyepictures.com/returninghome/rh_reviews_full.htm)), as it is very expensive to buy. The price provides information of the addressee of that film, and reveals the wish for a change for a change of the world as grotesque.

them over her hand and arm. Then in another image we see her naked decorated with mud, then again she is dressed in bundles of straw walking along the sides of a straw field.

Mostly Halprin does not move or moves very slowly. That gives us almost still and possibly sacred images of the old women in `nature´.

Halprins amazing eighty year old body somehow perfectly reflects the ancient memories and immortal youth embedded within the earths´ own age, eternal form. The lines of her face conjure some elemental indigenous race, pierced with dark eyes bright as stars, and evoke her and the natural world that so permeates her work (Lenzo, A., [www.openeyepictures.com/returninghome/rh\\_reviews\\_full.htm](http://www.openeyepictures.com/returninghome/rh_reviews_full.htm)).

It is rather unusual to show images of elderly women. Normally we see the female being represented through young, perhaps virgin, female body. Although the demonstration of an elderly woman in that way, strengthens the impression of firstly the inherited connection of the female body with `nature´ and secondly it leaves the impression of the sacred femininity, celebrated by some `indigenous cultures´ as it is also commented above. That is reinforced through the last image of the trailer, where we see her walking away through the forest holding a bell in her hand and ringing.

In an earlier work "Still dance" with Stubblefield, we find a similar connection in his commentary: "We come with our story, respond to the land´s larger power..." The specific concept of identity and the inherited connection with `nature´, which is subtly indicated in both "Land" and "Returning home", demonstrates a certain behaviour in the world, which can seldom be lived in most places where the natural environment is cultivated and designed or protected from the hands of men. What is intended with the promotion of these images? What philosophy or concept of the world stands behind these dance pieces?

It is necessary to look at the underlying concepts of these performances. To see whether they might promote ideas which they have not had intended. Susan Sontag revealed the contradiction between the statement of Leni Riefenstahl not to agree and follow fascist ideology, but after all reproducing it through her photographs, films and interviews (1972: 85-96).

If I look at both dance pieces only from my aesthetic perspective, they are very beautiful. The same could be said about different photographs from Leni Riefenstahl, looking simply at the beautiful and healthy bodies on her photos and then I would agree with Riefenstahl: "I can simply say that I feel spontaneously attracted by everything that is beautiful. Yes: beauty, harmony. And perhaps this care for composition, this aspiration to form is in effect something very German... I seek harmony. When harmony is produced I am happy...(Sontag, 1972:85)."

I do not agree with her, but I do agree with Sontag that it is necessary to look at the larger context and the message transported through these images, which evoke some of the larger themes of Nazi ideology: the contrast between the clean and the impure, the incorruptible and the defiled, the physical and the mental, the joyful and the critical... (ibid: 88). Therefore it is necessary to go further than my aesthetic understanding which I have developed having been socialized in a western European big city quasi alienated from `nature`. It is even more important in recent times, where many thoughts of the Nazi become alarmingly popular if one just thinks about the cult of beauty or the repudiation of the `disabled` and sick ones or the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community which can also be found in the techno-culture (Sontag, 1972:96, Berghaus, 1998: 65-73, 1996:40-65).

In order to bring the dance pieces described into a larger context of other works the choreographers did, I will summarize some of the biographical notes written about Anna Halprin and Eiko & Koma (for Anna Halprin: Kaplan (1995); Worth, Poynor (2004); many Internetsides / for Eiko and Koma: [www.eikoandkoma.org](http://www.eikoandkoma.org)).

## **Anna Halprin**

Anna Halprin has been described by Barrett (1998) as "...a pioneer for over 40 years in using dance and the relative arts for personal and planetary healing, contuse exploring and expanding the boundaries between art, medicine and the sacred. Her vision had been to broaden the definition of `dance` to include all natural, expressive movements of the body and to help people to discover their bodies intuitive wisdom and sensitivities ...". Her work has been highly influential for many postmodern dance artists (for example Simone Forti and many of the Judson church members including Steve Paxton). These artists `pilgered` to her summer workshops or to the Tamalpa Institute which she by herself had been founded together with her daughter in order to spread her philosophy of the `forming of an integrated self in the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual aspects`, which she developed after realising that something was missing in the dance world and namely that most performers were using bodies like objects. Their `Movement Rituals` or the `Life/Art Process` are well known results. Through Halprins experience of having survived cancer, she became more concerned about the healing potential of individuals and the world through

dance<sup>4</sup>. Her understanding of performance in general of the audience-performer relationship specifically was challenged so that she wants to include the audience<sup>5</sup>, thus reversing the historical process in which "ritualized dramatization of social life was gradually replaced by institutionalized reflexivity on stage (Hastrup in Hughes-Freeland, 1998:33)." Together with the participants she developed communitarian rituals<sup>6</sup> which were carried out in "performances" both in- and outdoor, which were not based on traditional rituals but arose out of the workshops and were made to reinforce the healing process. However, it seems to be necessary to say, that she had been influenced by her long-term relationship with the Pomo-Indians.

She has been criticised for producing rituals rather than dances as well as being more therapeutic than artistic. But her understanding of the arts and dance is much broader.<sup>7</sup> It is necessary to know that her understanding of dance is accessible for all. It is free of censorship and free of the controlling mind. Halprin believes that dance is "the most effective

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<sup>4</sup> Although she refuses the label "Therapist" as she believes "life is experienced as art, and through that expression, art becomes a living form" (Kaplan, 1995:185 and 187). A good example for that is Halprins explication of her aims for "the circle of Earth": "The re-discovery of the lost language of dance now offers us the very vehicle which people traditionally used to form their cultures and face their crises. And, strange to say, the dance we will recover has been purified and renewed by its long burial in the West. In a sense, ancient dances held their people captive, and tradition had to be preserved for a society to survive. It is probably almost as true to say that the dances created their people as it is to say that the people create their dances. Now we can use dance to re-create our culture.[...] You may believe that the power of the ancient dances came from the coordinated imagination of unified people, or you may join with those early dancers in the belief that the dances actually channel a subtle, all persuasive spiritual energy controlling physical manifestation.[...] Now, in our time of need, we have the opportunity to bring that power to bear on our task of transforming, reuniting and renewing our society so that we may find harmony among and between people of the earth (Halprin in Kaplan, 1995:241)."

<sup>5</sup> „Citydance“ was a day long performance with many people , going to many different sides of the city, using communitarian rituals as performances. „Planetary Dances“ should be performed by many people all around the world in order to "heal the world", a goal which for example was questioned by Schechner (Kaplan, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> "There is a very basic principle that underlies traditional rituals. The people enact in the ritual what they want to have happen in their lives.[...] I´m just going back to this hypothesis and testing it out again, only with contemporary rituals (Halprin in Kaplan, 1995:251)."

<sup>7</sup> The arts should "create and generate community"; "an art that speaks to and about and from the center of our lives, not an art corrupted by the ideology and reality of consumer culture and corporate mentality. We need an art that has an objective, rather than an art content merely to be an object. We need an art that transcends our differences and brings us together in our commonality, our humanity, our constant striving for the truth in our lives and an understanding of the mysteries around us. We need artists willing to transcend the myth of isolation and suffering shrouding their role, artists who will step into the public sphere and take on community leadership and transmit their knowledge about creativity and the life of the imagination [...] (Kaplan, 1995:187)

and holistic way of communicating with themselves and the higher powers" – synonymous with that of 'the indigenous people' (Halprin in Barrett, 1998). In this sense she believes that the body carries memories, ancient knowledge and personal and collective experiences in it. Likewise, her understanding of our relationship to 'nature', increasingly obscured through urban and technological lifestyles and reduced to 'an inanimate object' which we attempt 'to exploit and control' (Worth, Poynor, 2004:86). Halprin creates dance on the dance deck using natural elements and she guides exercises in 'nature' such as the 'experiential cycle', believing that such experiences empower people (Kaplan, 1995:101, Halprin in Worth, Poynor, 2004:86).

From her perspective humanity is part of 'nature' and it is possible to understand the natural world as a reflection of human experiences, but also as a fundamental source for our aesthetic sensibilities which derive from an intrinsic connection between our inner world and the outer landscape. However, she does not find that there are absolute rules for working artistically in the natural environment (Worth, Poynor, 2004:87-91).

This leads on to the description of the performer Eiko and Koma, for whom the representation and the use of nature seem to be intrinsically important and is recognisable in their choice of names for performances such as "land", "breath" or "river". The latter, for example was performed both indoors and outdoors in various rivers. They both share the interest in ritual and myth, and an unself-conscious regard for the nude body and an affinity for nature (Kisselgoff in Worth, Poynor, 2004:46).

## **Eiko and Koma**

Eiko and Koma were both born in Japan, but they have been resident of the United States since 1976. Without having trained in traditional Japanese dance, they both started to study dance with Kazuo Ohno and then later in German Expressionist dance. As I have already stated, their philosophy can be linked with that of Anna Halprin by their mutual belief that our lives are interconnected with life throughout the universe. This is clarified through Eikos following statement about her piece "When Nights Were Dark":

This will be an altar and a hearse, where the audience feels invited to pray without a language. We will address death, sleep, walking, awakening, and cycles of life in the glowing light that suggests our destiny and our beginning.

(Eiko in Carbonneau, 2005, [www.eikoandkoma.org/ekcarbonneau.html](http://www.eikoandkoma.org/ekcarbonneau.html))

Other similarities to Anna Halprins philosophy can be found in their workshop descriptions – first they are open to everybody having the aim to help the people finding a body attitude which can last throughout life, which are held indoors and outside, which aim to create a new model of community and the objective to liberate dancers both from conventional “dances” and “self-expression.”

The following passage is taken from Eiko and Komas website relating to their workshops: “We conduct a series of “partnership exercises” to build a tribal amity. Each partnership is a new learning of sensual, nonchalant but caring dances. They “dream together”, “forgetting their individual differences” and “feel the other person’s needs and desires as their own.” The intimate, bodily knowledge of the “other”, whether instinctively felt, experientially finds, or imagined, is an important part of the partnering exercise and of a process to create “Humanness.” ([www.eikoandkoma.org/ekworkshops.html](http://www.eikoandkoma.org/ekworkshops.html)). This language is common for offerings of all kinds of esoteric or New Age workshops and the use of similar language implies a philosophical connection. The language and message corresponds with peoples search for a spiritual dimension in life as reaction to the crisis of postmodernity, inventing traditions in order “to end, for a time ours sense of human alienation from nature and from each other (Adler in Berghaus, 1998:70).” Later I will look closer at these critical implications.

Both pieces seek a biological and yet sacred connection between `nature´ and human beings which helps people to project their desires into something unreachable like religious beliefs. I doubt having had a go collecting coffee beans on a plantation that the same feelings of seeing at least Halprins film are provoked in the coffee-seed-collectors, who are surrounded by a nice and `natural´ environment.

Therefore I will analyse the significance of the provocation of pseudo-religious feeling in the following section. Firstly I will describe why the use of `nature´ can be signified as a ritualistic element. After which I will enter the more general discourse of `nature´, which will than support my argumentation of `nature´ used in dance can be not only compared with the use of ritualistic elements but named as a ritualistic element.

### **The ritualistic element of dancing in nature**

Before looking into `nature´ in and through dance, we can remember that Halprin ascribes dance to be a ritual act (Schechner in Kaplan, 1995:251), also she is using spontaneous

participatory rituals in workshops or performances in a non-traditional way in order to empower the people.

These communitarian rituals are most often performed outdoors in a natural environment. Although 'nature' is simply the space where the rituals take place, there is a special connection between 'nature' and ritual, because ritual can only be realised in 'nature', because of the special role 'nature' fulfils in these rituals. 'Nature' and natural environment are places of retreat, which offers us solace, nurturing, inspiration and wisdom and a feeling of coming home. The outdoor experience is necessary to re-establish a sense of relatedness to the natural world and helps to extend every kind of perception in order to re-connect the individual with the nature with the main objective "to move us... towards a deeper understanding of the sanctity of the earth and our place upon it ((Kaplan, 1995:101, Halprin in Worth, Poynor, 2004:86).

Therefore 'nature' can be seen as ritualism<sup>8</sup> in the sense that it "acts as a social bonding mechanism. It gives the individual a feeling of being connected to something larger than him/herself... Rituals are therefore essential tools for the creation and maintenance of social structures, corporate identities and collective actions (as well as exercising control and sanctioning power) (Berghaus, 1996:45)."

Another definition of ritualization is to describe certain social actions: "as a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane', and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors (Bell, 1992:74)." This definition suits more to Eiko and Koma who express through dance their impressions they got from their being in 'nature'. They are almost performing 'nature' itself, outlining the peculiarity of 'nature' for us as human beings. It is through their movement style<sup>9</sup> that "we are reminded that we are part of nature that all beings share the mutuality of being subject to natural forces and the life circle." (Carbonneau,2005, [www.eikoandkoma.org/ekcarbonneau.html](http://www.eikoandkoma.org/ekcarbonneau.html)).

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<sup>8</sup> There are many definitions and books about rituals and ritualization (Turner, Schechner, Bell, Berghaus, ...), therefore I will not give an overview of these different definitions, but select the most appropriate one.

<sup>9</sup> Aspects of their movement style can be linked to an aesthetic with its roots in Taoism and Zen Buddhism, where the idea of passage is emphasised through timeless and endless journeys, characterized through body movements almost unrecognizable as human or disappearing into the landscape (ibid.).

Another example of the production "Land" is that Eiko and Koma stated that they had discovered a larger connection with the world of their ancestors. Eiko explains this through remembering her education in Japan. This has always been to respect their ancestors, but has changed even more during the working for "Land", where she discovered a larger connection to all human and non human being all over the period of time (Rosenberg, 1995, interview). This example shows on one hand the going back to traditional views of their cultural background, but also it reveals their belief of a biological inherited connection of all human beings, which fits into other aspects of ritualizations in order to reinforce community feelings, social bonding, group solidarity and commitment to certain belief systems (Berghaus, 1998:70).

Since the Industrial revolution the rapid disappearance of structured living environment and the experience of alienation in the economic and social spheres, provoked the growth of another understanding of `nature´ as a thing which has to be protected, re-discovered and blessed, as well as copying a new understanding of `nature´ from `the traditional cultures´, which are still rooted in `nature´ and use their rituals in order to bless `the nature and their gods´. These feelings of alienation, belonging to nowhere etc. provoked a search for the reasons for that and solution to get out of them<sup>10</sup>. In the same sense as Turner described the people´s need for `communitas´ (Turner, 1982) it is possible for people to project their needs onto `nature´. In order to find the real `nature´ of themselves and outside, they search for that: looking at traditions of the so-named `indigenous cultures´, workshop-offerings or in other historical and scientific beliefs.

Halprin especially found a healing potential in dancing in `nature´ (Kaplan, 1995:185-187), which Berghaus classifies as another function of `ritual theatre´ in a moment of crisis (1996:5).

Furthermore, the dance of or in `nature´ is something unusual and non-traditional<sup>11</sup> for most western Europeans, so that the carrying out of the action becomes something special, distinguished from other actions like going to a dance class or seeing a performance. This peculiarity touches a deeply irrational core that no other form of propaganda can reach. "It conveys political messages in an overtly non-political form. In addition, it provides the participant with an experience of the self in communion with others, all of whom are

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<sup>10</sup> Without wanting to polemize are a lot of people drawn to find easy solution for their problems.

<sup>11</sup> I exclude that dancing outdoor was an integral part in the german Ausdruckstanz (Mählmann, 1998).

potential subscribers to the presented belief system (Berghaus, 1996:5).” Because of that ‘nature’ can fulfil the same role as rituals do in order to serve as adaptive technique of individuals and groups to face situations of crisis (Berghaus, 1998:65-73, Haraway, 1992: 295-298).

On the other hand this peculiarity of dancing in or of ‘nature’ gives the actual action a certain focus, which can lead to an increase of attention towards the actual action. That might raise the level of consciousness with which the action is carried out- something which is also ascribed to rituals (Schieffelin in Hughes-Freeland, 1998:196). Furthermore if the ritual process is seen as liminal-liminoid, unauthorized, anti-structural, subjunctive and subversive (Turner in Schechner, 1993: 256), than the announcement of the here regarded performers to increase consciousness is supported. On the other hand Esherick and Wasserstrom argue that only theatre has a critical power which was never possessed by ritual (in Schechner, 1993:55). Therefore we have to question if using than a ritualistic element such as ‘nature’ can really raise consciousness and be used as a critical power?

With this argumentation I wanted to show that the use of ‘nature’ in dance has to be regarded as a ritualistic element and as such it involves diverse functions and consequences, which will be explored in the following part. First it is necessary to look at the significance of ‘nature’. I will not give a definition of ‘nature’ as I am looking onto ‘nature’ through the eyes of discourse analysis<sup>12</sup>. Discourse analysis is defined as a) a study of language as a dynamic phenomenon looking beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, (b) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and (c) as concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication. Therefore understanding means understanding in a certain context (Andersson, Stubbs, 1983:1).

‘Nature’ cannot be an exception. We cannot find an objective view in ‘nature’ itself, but only one which arises out of social struggles over people’s values and attitudes (Andersson).

## ‘Nature’

As the working and dancing in ‘nature’ or in natural environment can be seen as a core aspect of Halprins personal and aesthetic practice (Worth, Poynor, 2004:86), it is necessary to analyse the implied meaning of ‘nature’. Halprin drew her attention towards the natural world for the following three reasons, because the processes of ‘nature’ are guidelines for

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<sup>12</sup> For further reading about discourse analysis see Stubbs (1983)

her aesthetics, because the human body is a microcosm of the earth and because she finds a healer in `nature`. Although she does not want to represent `nature` itself, but to find it inside herself and seeks to understand the natural world as a reflection of her experience as a human being (Kaplan, 1995:214-216). Comparing titles of dance pieces from Eiko and Koma (e.g. River, Tree Song, Breath,...) it is possible to assume that they have a similar philosophy, although there is not enough information about them to analyse their philosophy precisely. Therefore I will focus in the following part more on Halprins work, without forgetting that both assume the close and ancient rapport between humans and the `nature` and that they promote a returning to a live in the context of `nature`, which they found encoded in our biology and our mythology.

Is that true and where does this power and connection come from – is it really encoded in our biology or is it seeking to find a reason for dissatisfaction in our lives – concealed by the “spiritual loss of our connection with `nature`? Does `nature` – as something almost religious take over a representative function for something else missing from our lives? That would explain why earth religions, nature worships and eco-spirituality are the fast developing new religions of the twenty-first century. And it is here where Halprin and her work are joining the large row of New Age and neo-pagan groups, which are all concerned with the search for authenticity, identity as well as healing and the rebuilding of a holistic culture (Berghaus, Performance Research: Rituals, 1998:71).

But before I come back to this point, I want to question the concept of `nature` described in the work of both Halprin and Eiko & Koma, bringing in a very different interpretation of `nature`, which is that of `nature` being an ideological and social construct, constructed, categorized and ordered through and within the development of science (Foucault, 1970:128-162, Haraway, 1992). Therefore `nature` is “not a physical place to which one can go, nor a treasure to fence in or bank, nor as essence to be saved or violated. Nature is not hidden and so does not need to be unveiled [...]. Neither mother, nurse, nor slave, nature is not matrix, resource, or tool for the reproduction of man (1992:296)”, but it is one discourse like others e.g. colonialism, racism or sexism. Biology- the science of life teaches us the objective side of life, how everything evolved from the one cell until men. Halprin, Eiko and Koma try to find the truth of `nature` from the other way around, searching it internally through dance in the `nature`. But as Foucault (1976) described there is no getting out of the network of power and the discourse about `nature` is another one to stabilize this network of power. Haraway (1992:296-305) demonstrates how certain local/global struggles for meanings and embodiments of `nature` are occurring as a response, but not always as a form of resistance, to modern and postmodern

commercialism, because they are trying to find the truth of `nature´ and that is where they are caught in the net of power. In finding another relationship to `nature´, besides reification and possession, and to avoid fitting into the preconceived categories and taxa of `nature´, but seeing `nature´ as a commonplace and a powerful discursive construction, it is possible to become inappropriate/d - using Haraways term- in the sense "to be in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflection (ratio)nality- as the means of making potent connection that exceeds domination (299)."

In applying Haraways theory to Halprin work of healing the individual through re-establishing a sense of relatedness to the natural world, guides to the question to what amount this desire serves rather to maintain the capitalist society than lead to social change. But it also raises the question how to classify the experiences people have when they are experiencing `nature´ through movement and dance or seeing Halprins "Still dances" or Eiko and Komas "Land". Contrariwise, it questions all these experiences of wholeness and relatedness. If we regard the whole discourse of `nature´ under a perspective of an ideology, it changes the whole viewpoint. Althusser sees the function of ideology, the feeling of wholeness among others in helping to create a specific reality, under which the individual decides how and why to act. That is why ideology is both persuasive and coercive, because it positions the individual within a specific of reality, explaining their conditions of existences (Reinelt, 1992:164). If we see the last part of the excerpt "Land" as an ideological presentation of family structures and how life has to be, it becomes a different meaning to just an aesthetic observation, because we then have to ask what the performers intended to say to us. Did Eiko and Koma want to emphasize the traditional family construction? Did they want us to believe in fate rather than our own capabilities to create our lives?

We have to ask these questions even more, if we see ideology as a veil that hides a group from itself and that is therefore necessary "to see it as the instrument of appropriation of rhetoric of legitimacy by power-holding or power-seeking groups (Merquior in Bell, 1992:190)." Bell among others demands to rethink ideology as a lived and practical consciousness, where people follow their own self-interest, as well as it is a partial and oppositional process actively constructed by all involved and taking place in the very organization of everyday life. Therefore it is no coherent set of ideas, imposed on people, but is always in dialogue with us. It can be further on understood as a strategy of power, through which certain social practices are depicted to be `natural´ and `right´ (1992:191-192). That leads us to think about the interests Halprin as well as Eiko and Koma can have in bringing `nature´ as a core element into their dance work. Is it just their mutual intuitive belief or something else?

To Haraways unveiling of nature being a construction, a discourse, we can add the necessity to see `nature´ as an ideological construct. Before exploring the function of this ideological construct of `nature´, one might ask if Halprin, Eiko and Koma are conscious about that ideological construction and use it for their own purposes or if they fall into the trap of believing of the objectivity of `nature´.

As ideological constructions are created out of certain hegemonic power structures in order to keep them alive, it is necessary to take a closer look at these structures of power relationships.

## **Power**

Understanding power in the Foucauldian sense; as a matter of techniques and discursive practices that comprise the micropolitics of everyday life, but not as a substantive entity or something what can be possessed. Power does not exist in historical forms or causal effects, but can be described as a mode of actions and relations in any society and in any direction. That means for example that the power of capitalism has to be rooted in pre-existing forms of behaviour, socialised bodies, and local relations of power, which could not be mere projections of the central power and still effectively maintain and legitimate that power. Foucault further argues that freedom is the precondition and condition for the exercise of power. This necessity of freedom to the exercise of power implies as well the resistance. Therefore the exercise of power can be seen as a strategic choice of ways from among ways of interacting and in depends upon a variety of practices chosen by the parties involved to maintain the relationship as one of power.

The body is the most basic and fundamental level of power relations and it is through the body that the sovereign power is constituted. Related to ritualization, it is the central way that power operates as ritualization is constituted with and through the body. Therefore the body is the arena for a strategic play of power, of domination and resistance. According to Bell it is well documented how much ritualization empower those who control or regulate ritual practices (Bell, 1922:197-223). If the goal is on the other hand the redemption of the Ego, the liberation from the captivity of individual narrowness and individual anxieties, and the surrender into the universe, the whole, the community, than we touch what Kurz analysed as the psychological function of fascist theatre (in Berghaus, 1996:61). "Ritualism was believed to be an effective tool to foster a fascist community, to instil a fascist ideology in the people, and to win support for fascist political actions (ibid: 65).

Manning had an association with the form of movement choir used in Nazi spectacle and Halprins Earth Dance, when the latter was offering a spontaneous ritual at the Choreographing History conference in February 1992. She was raising the question if it was just her own history grappling with the issues of modern dance in the Third Reich that determined her response to Halprins Earth Dance or if her response could be generalized. Asking other participants she got different responses. Nevertheless she concluded her essay by claiming the necessity to add different variables such as national origin, gender, generation to the "shifting interplay between ideology and form in response to the multiple contexts of patronage and politics (Manning in Foster, 1995: 175)."

I would add that Foucault's analysis of power and resistance as interdependent of each other, can help to understand in which way Halprins reference of non-traditional ritual practices or Eiko and Komasa production "Land" contain only one aspect of this dialectic relationship or both the practices of resistance and that reinforcements of traditional hegemonic power structures.

As 'nature' is a discourse, therefore its ritualization is a discursive practice. Consequently, it contains both empowerment as a symbol of resistance or reinforcement of the ones in demand in the net of power. That depends on all persons involved -performers, audience members, teachers and workshop-participants. Where Grotowski, Goodman and Schechner argue that the learning about different cultural practices will help to understand more about one cultural practices and raise consciousness about governing pattern (Schechner, 1993:253) and just see the positive side, Althusser would argue that the practice or learning alone is problematic, as it does not see what itself produces in the very operation of that practice or learning. It should include a theoretical reflection of that learning or practice in order to analyze the outcome of the practice.

Transferring that to the use of 'nature' in dance: consciousness is not raised in just an increase of ones practices of dancing in 'nature' or seeing 'nature' being performed in dance performances if it is not followed by a reflection. The practice proves the theory and theory actualize the practice in a dialectical relationship (Bell, 1992: 74-88); embedded in the social-historical context in order to unveil the discourse in it.

This could be for example through analysing the experiences of workshop participants have had whilst they are dancing in 'nature' and connect them to their real life in order to bring into consciousness what they might be missing in their real life and then to think about possible action to change it. To use the practice in Marx way as a unity of consciousness and social being characterized by the potential to transform real existence (Bell, 1992:75).

Concluding the analysis of the two dance pieces is that they only hold the potential of resistance through the statements of the performer, but not because of a theoretical and critical reflection, which is embedded in a socio-historical context. That is the reason why the excerpts of both dance pieces involve very critical implications which as I stated before could be put into line with esoteric and fascist beliefs.

With this essay I wanted to turn the attention firstly on to the uncritical use of `nature´ and secondly I wanted to bring the discourse of `nature´ into the dance world into order to create a reflective practice which is embedded within the socio-historical context, without saying that presentation of `nature´ in dance in general is critical, but that it has to be contextualized.

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