

## The ambivalent visibility of labour

Exposed to the optical unconsciousness of the camera, the choreography of still images developed in *Transformance* embodies the uncertain and fragile existence of both artists and workers in the age of biopolitical surveillance. The intricate relation between the seemingly passive *gestus* of the (female) performer and the hard working body of the male worker, is negotiated through an enduring action, in which the female body becomes the silent witness of the labour that will radically alter an old BVG public transport warehouse into Uferstudios, a contemporary dance center in Berlin. One of my first associations regarding Nina's durational performance was the tradition of the so called *Gastarbeiter*s, foreign/migrant workers coming from Yugoslavia or Turkey who, mainly in the 60s and 70s, used to work in West Germany, contributing to its economic miracle after the defeat in the Second World War. Yet the role of the *Gastarbeiter* (or maybe even *ghostarbeiter*?) is doubled: on the first level we really see workers on the construction site, while, on the other hand, we also follow Nina, as well as her "ghost performers", who, on the edge of visibility, enter our perception as subliminal, flickering images. The tension of these two regimes of visibility entails a process-oriented temporality, in which the real, material action of the workers is mirrored (and underscored) with Nina's immobilized choreography and the haunting performances of her absent friends.

Contrasting the material dimension of labour and the imaginary production of the art work the performance and video tend to displace the fixed borders between production and reproduction, presence and representation, document and fiction. For my argument, however, this media strategy is not relevant so much in terms of a performance protocol, but because of the economic and political consequences. In other words, I shall not be concerned with the apparatus of Nina's piece, but with its implicit political meaning and some of the ambivalences it generates. It might be argued that these two aspects of the piece are interrelated, yet for the sake of clarity I shall analyse just one dimension. Although there has seldom been a period in which artistic labour has had full financial support, in the last few years we are, again, confronted with a situation in which artists have been exposed to the imperative of either commercialising their endeavours and entering the spectacular worlds of commodity or dwelling on the margins of economic activity. On the other hand, contemporary artistic practice is strategically used for *uneven development* and, thus, it often becomes a medium of gentrification. In the case of *Transformance* it is (in my opinion) precisely this undecided position that can serve as a springboard to reflect on the political dimension of the piece.

The twofold regime of visibility and division of labour can be considered the point in which Nina stages the condition of precarity by displaying working bodies. Setting up a stage on which she, the workers and her ghost performers will be surveilled by a static camera that resembles the technique of CCTV, Nina forces the viewer to find him/herself identifying with the controlling/inspecting gaze. Due to this procedure, the exposure of labour becomes the generating event in which the fragile posture of the dancer is brought to a level equal to that

of the workers. It is this equidistributed discernibility that enables the attention to be shifted from the signifying economy of the mediatized performance to political and class-related issues. What both groups have in common is their presence on a construction site that soon will be transformed into a contemporary dance and performing arts venue and will thereby attract more people to the shabby working class Wedding neighbourhood, changing it into an area of expensive housing. Having that in mind one could claim that the art work itself is an uncanny operation, since we could accuse the artist of documenting, thus, implicitly participating in, the act of gentrification. A series of concluding, unsettling questions here may thus arise: What is the relation between capital, labour and art in *Transformance*? Can art transverse its alignment with the power structures of capital? Does the visibility of work and workers increase or decrease our awareness of the economic, cultural and semiotic transformation of the site? How is this piece to be seen in terms of class and production relations? Is it supporting class differences or can it be seen as an attempt to subvert them? What about the artist? Is she just using precarious work to underline her position as a Gastarbeiter in Germany and gain extra profit? Is she demonstrating a kind of solidarity with the workers or are her deeds oriented towards their symbolic exploitation? And finally: does this engender appropriation or emancipation?

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