

# No Room for MOTION: Germany's Forgotten Dance Pioneers MOTION Berlin

by Kathrin Pollow

In 1962, a small collective of Mary Wigman students from Berlin decided the time was ripe to show their work outside of the studio setting. They were experimenting with ideas and approaches very different to what could be seen on West Germany's ballet dominated stages at the time, and after a much-lauded first performance, they mustered up the courage to found the nation's first post-war free dance company. This implied to find stages away from the established theaters and operas, which up to this point had shown no inclination for the hosting of alternative programs.

Five strenuous years later most of the founding members of the by then extended group left Germany. Berlin's cultural institutions had proven disinterested in their vision. Despite the company's considerable critical and public acclaim, the city's officials stubbornly refused to honor the young artists' work with a minimum of financial or material support.

They immigrated to America. Set up camp in Philadelphia. Created a performance-space, which strives and is legendary still today, almost 50 years later. Founded more companies. Taught dancers of the next generations, who travelled back to the Old World, engaged in further merging and thus advanced elements of the legacy of this -- in Germany almost unrecognized company -- into the 21st Century.

Who are we talking about? The group MOTION Berlin. In the beginning of this project – *The Life Legacy Project: Correspondences between German Contemporary Dance and Judson Dance Theater Movement* – we had hoped to unearth a very specific hidden jewel of German dance history: The archived manifestation of a recorded influence of the Judson Dancers on German dance, or a German dance company in the 60s.<sup>1</sup> We did not find that.<sup>2</sup> However, in the German Dance Archives Cologne, I stumbled over a name, which sounded promising: MOTION – Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz.<sup>3</sup> It turned out, that the collective had had its first concert only 51 days

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://the-live-legacy-project.com/> (last accessed January 30, 2015).

For a comprehensive history on the Judson Dance Theater see: Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1980, reprinted 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Who are „we“? This essay and its preliminary research were commissioned by the *The Life Legacy Project: Correspondences between German Contemporary Dance and Judson Dance Theater Movement*. My thanks go to the project's director Angela Guerreiro, who entrusted me with this job and was enthusiastic and supportive throughout. She was immediately convinced about the relevance of MOTION Berlin's forgotten legacy and pushed for further research even though it went slightly beyond the scope of the project's original question. I'm equally thankful to the project's collaborator Karen Schaffmann, who was just as encouraging, and furthermore enhanced the writing process with her many insights.

<sup>3</sup> Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, <http://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/> (last accessed January 30, 2015). The archive holds several boxes with original material of MOTION Berlin (copies of reviews, the group's correspondence by Hellmut Gottschild (1962-1967), photos, copies of flyers, programs, documents) and personal documents of Inge Sehnert (school-certificates, applications, unemployment cards, contracts, fee-invoices, reviews, photos,

before the New Yorker students had their legendary premiere at Judson Church.<sup>4</sup> Further obvious similarities were, for example, both companies' references to post-modern dance forefather Merce Cunningham, the performances of the Living Theater, the love of electronic music, their cited inspiration by the visual art-scene, or the use of improvisation on stage. But a closer look at MOTION Berlin's photos and manifestos, their letters in search for support, for performance space, and recognition, their many supportive, and more bone-crushing reviews in German newspapers, their tireless struggle for survival, their defeat in Berlin, and their following rebirth in Philadelphia revealed a very different approach to dance – at least in those early years. In fact, the quiet, disciplined, fine-tuned, virtuoso, torso-concentrated bodywork of the Germans, who were obsessed with the creation and perception of movement as autonomous vocabulary, had not too much in common with the far more care-free and experimental style of the post-modern dance pioneers in New York and their focus on – and fascination with – ordinary, habitual and unpracticed, raw movement. Also MOTION Berlin's self-absorbed, abstract and message free dances were contrasted by the deliberately politically and socially charged pieces of the Judson dancers. Definitely one group was not influenced by the other. Still we could not just turn away. The odyssey of this young post-war collective of artists just proved too arresting, and their financially desperate situation rang eerily topical bells.<sup>5</sup>

I tried to find out more about MOTION Berlin. In Philadelphia – the re-structured group's chosen hometown since 1968 – “the Germans” contribution to the city's diverse dance scene is widely acknowledged and supported.<sup>6</sup> The company's

---

flyers & programs). Additionally there are 3 short videos, a short clip of MOTION Berlin's performance in Zagreb in 1965, and two from 1966 (teasers in the (cultural-)news-shows *Berliner Abendschau* and *Aspekte* respectively.) Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion; Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert; Dokumentation. Many thanks to Thomas Thoraus for his ongoing support of the project.

M O T I O N – studio-group for new dance. All translations in this text are by the author, unless otherwise cited.

During its 5 years in Berlin, MOTION Berlin continuously alternated its name on flyers and programs. It changed from: Die Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz – M O T I O N, to Studiogruppe für neuen Tanz – MOTION BERLIN, to Motion Berlin – Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz, to M O T I O N Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz, M O T I O N, and MOTION Berlin. In this text I speak of MOTION Berlin, when I refer to the group's active years in Germany. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln – Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

When the company moved to Philadelphia, it first performed under the name of Gruppe Motion Berlin, then changed to Group Motion Multi Media Dance Theater and/or Group Motion. To simplify matters, I speak of Group Motion, when I refer to the company after 1967. See also poster *Countdown For Orpheus*, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion; as well as the company's website: <http://groupmotion.org> (last accessed January 30, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> First Judson Dance Theater concert: July 6, 1962.

<sup>5</sup> See the current debate about minimum artist fees.

<sup>6</sup> A fact brought home to me in the late 90s, when I studied history at Temple University: despite of no affiliation with the contemporary dance-scene, I was asked by one of my fellow history students to join her at this “really cool friday night dance workshop, which is open for everyone” ... Upon arrival in Philadelphia, Helmut Gottschild and Manfred Fischbek had received faculty posts at Temple University and the University of

pioneering work in Germany, on the other hand, has been almost ignored.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Irene Sieben – who danced in Motion Berlin’s last German production, *Countdown for Orpheus* in 1976 – has been the only author repeatedly referring to – and calling for – a reappraisal also of the German legacy of this young and daring vanguard group. It was her essay in celebration of 20 years of Berlin’s “post-Judson-kitchen” Tanzfabrik, which finally convinced me I was not completely off with my idea of a link, or lineage between the two.<sup>8</sup> Thus we decided to tell MOTION Berlin’s story as a kind of ante-dote to what was going to happen afterwards. Yes, MOTION Berlin had never heard of anything like the Judson Dance Theater. Approach, aesthetics, and radicality of the two groups differ greatly. However, irrespectively of each other, the two collectives developed new languages of movement and accordingly demanded the overthrow of traditional viewing patterns. Their ideas and dreams of an independent, and unorthodox free contemporary dance scene, and their will to create something different at all cost, coincided. Later on also their lifelines crossed.

## Dreams

On May 16, 1962, a handcrafted, typewritten flyer at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste announced an on-site concert of “FORMER STUDENTS OF THE MARY WIGMAN STUDIO”<sup>9</sup> and added hopefully, almost jubilantly: “The newly composed program, which premieres tonight, is supposed to go on tour in West-Germany.”<sup>10</sup>

---

the Arts respectively. For further information on Group Motion’s activities in Philadelphia see for example: <http://groupmotion.org/> (last accessed January 28, 2015); Rita Feliciano, *Expressive Roots: Philadelphia Dance and its German Lineage*, Dance Advance, The Pew Center for Arts and Heritage documents, 2011; Nancy Goldner, *For Group Motion, 20 Years of Ups and Downs*, posted on October 9, 1988 at Philly.com, [http://articles.philly.com/1988-10-09/entertainment/26270196\\_1\\_performers-hellmut-gottschild-creative-dance](http://articles.philly.com/1988-10-09/entertainment/26270196_1_performers-hellmut-gottschild-creative-dance) (last accessed February 28, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> In 1987, the German dance-magazine *tanzaktuell* ran a several pages long interview with Hellmut Gottschild, in which it emphasizes “the exceptional significance of Motion in Germany.” Hellmut Gottschild Interview, *tanzaktuell*, September 1987 (vol 2, no 8), pp. 2-5. And from October 2000 – January 2001 the German Dance Archives Cologne had organized an exhibition with the title “MOTION – Abstract Works of Art in Motion” („MOTION – Abstrakte Kunstwerke in Bewegung”).

<sup>8</sup> In this essay Sieben points out that many of the founding members of the Tanzfabrik, were trained by the Mary Wigman alumni of Group Motion. Irene Sieben, *20 Jahre Tanzfabrik: Nicht nur eine Tanzgeschichte* in Claudia Feest (Hg.), *Tanzfabrik: Ein Berliner Modell im Zeitgenössischen Tanz, 1978-1998* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 12-20. In a recent article in *Tanz*, Sieben calls for a reappraisal of MOTION Berlin’s legacy and, referring to the Tanzfabrik, coins the term of “Berlin’s post-Judson-kitchen“. Irene Sieben, „Visible Undercurrent“, *Tanz*, November 2014, pp. 13-14. In the same issue of *Tanz*, the set-designer, dancer, and Jacalyn Carley colleague Ric Schachtebek talks about the American Group Motion’s revolutionary impact on his own formative years as a dancer. Jacalyn Carley, who was brought to Berlin by Schachtebek, staid on and became a partner at Tanzfabrik. Ric Schachtebek, „Westfenster“, *Tanz* (November 2014), pp. 56-59.

<sup>9</sup> The group did not even have a name yet.

<sup>10</sup> Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln – Bestand 210 / Group Motion

Hellmut Gottschild<sup>11</sup>, Brigitta Herrmann, and Inge Sehnert had high-flying plans. All of them were in their mid-twenties, all of them had been trained and were greatly motivated by Wigman assistant, disciple and relentless reformer Manja Chmiel.<sup>12</sup> Prior to his dance-education Gottschild had completed an apprenticeship as a painter and he superseded Chmiel as Wigman's last assistant until 1967. In later interviews he and his colleagues should profess an enormous amount of indebtedness and gratitude for their former teacher, but in '62, all they wanted was to get away from the elderly woman (she was 66 by then), and her expressive style, and "find states of being [...purely...] inside movement."<sup>13</sup>

For MOTION Berlin it was all about movement. Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, John Cage and David Tudor had performed in Berlin in 1960,<sup>14</sup> and Helmut Gottschild recalls, all he wanted to choreograph afterwards were "cool and unemotional" dances à la Cunningham, which „was a most refreshing contrast to the heated atmosphere of the Wigman Studio.“<sup>15</sup> In hindsight Gottschild praises Wigman's methods, which according to him have lost nothing of their freshness even nowadays. Contrary to the standardized technical honing of ballet-dancers, she attempted to access her students' inner depths. Endless repetitions of the same moves in order to reach a state of ecstasy, explorations of gravity, time, rhythm, energy, and space, the perception of space as an invisible partner were her answer to systematized ballet and modern dance technique; improvisation and breath pathways to true, individual expression. But the internationally acclaimed pioneer of expressionist dance (Ausdruckstanz)<sup>16</sup> had spoiled her reputation with some of the younger Germans through her opportunistic compliance with the Nazis, the execution of an order to expel her Jewish dancers from her company in 1934, the choreography of a mass event for the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, and the adherence to a mystic, pathos-laden, and symbolic rhetoric, reminiscent of Nazi imagery.<sup>17</sup> According to Gottschild his revered teacher had lost touch with the time.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> In his early years Hellmut Gottschild went under the name of Hellmut Fricke-Gotschild, later he shortened it to Hellmut Gottschild. To simplify matters, I will stick to his later choice throughout this article.

<sup>12</sup> In fact also Manja Chmiel founded her own company Neuer Tanz (*New Dance*) in 1962. For more on Chmiel see for example Irene Sieben's beautiful tribute, which is featured on the German Dance Archive Cologne's website under Manja Chmiel: <http://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/>, last accessed October 17, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Gottschild cited by Feliciano, *Expressive Roots*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> At the theater Hebbel am Ufer, September 28-30, 1960. Sabine Huschka, *Merce Cunningham und der Moderne Tanz: Körperkonzepte, Choreographie und Tanzästhetik* (Würzburg, 2000), p.463.

<sup>15</sup> Gottschild cited by Feliciano, *Expressive Roots*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Connected to the expressionist art movement, and a cross current to the classical ballet, expressionist dance (at times also called free dance or new dance) flourished in the early 20th Century and provided a forum for the artistic expression of personal sentiment in dance. Mary Wigman's performances were at times devoid of light, costumes and music, her dances danced for the sake of dance. Dance was elevated to an absolute, autonomous language. Mary Ann Santos Newhall, *Mary Wigman* (New York, 2009), 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Wigman later successfully "sanitized" her legacy with the publishing of her memoirs in which she represented herself as a victim of the Nazi's persecution of "degenerate artists". Historians failed to review her version of events for decades. For this see Susan

Gottschild, Herrmann and Sehnert felt it was time for change. The May-concert had been a huge success, and emboldened them to found post-war Germany's first independent dance-company. The goal, later on also penned down in a type-written, manifest-like statement (very much in correspondence to the global Zeitgeist then): to strip dance from its fixation on individual personalities, superfluous props, accessories, and emotion. Cooperative creational processes, bare stages, no costumes, and empty (facial) expressions were the means employed for the generation of imaginary room(s). Music should not be an accompanying factor but stand for itself.<sup>19</sup> Movement would be created for movement's sake. The group's first review, which they received later that year, read accordingly:

“Their style [...] is free of showiness. [...] Primary tensions of space and time, overlapping, moving bodies in space, different movement structures are radically abstracted, and experience a cool, impersonal stylization.”<sup>20</sup>

Gottschild's prior involvement with -- and affiliation to -- the art scene seemed to have left its mark. MOTION Berlin essentially echoed and translated the basic tenets of the Zero art movement, which had been founded by the German artists Otto Piene and Heinz Mack in Düsseldorf, in 1958, into dance. Faced with an environment reduced to rubble after World War II, Zero had demanded an absolute restart within the arts. Materials were used in new, uncommon ways and color was elevated to an autonomous medium. The artists painted with fire, movement and light, and they exhibited their art in new environments.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly their art was supposed to be emotion-free.

---

A. Manning's widely acclaimed study and revision of Mary Wigman's dance-repertoire: Susan A. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1993), pp. 3-9, 166-221.

<sup>18</sup> Gottschild cited by Feliciano. Feliciano, *Expressive Roots*, p. 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> “We recognized the necessity to put free dance, which for long had been carried solely by single personalities, on the more objective and effective base of group work and to renew it from its medium: movement. [...] Superstructures, sets, room-dominating props [...and...] formally accented costume would render the creation of the imaginary room impossible. [...] [The music] does not carry content and meaning; [it] is self-sufficient [...] and does not need interpretation.” „Wir erkannten es als notwendig, den Freien Tanz, der lange Zeit fast ausschließlich von Einzelpersonlichkeiten getragen worden war, auf die objektivere und wirkungsvollere Basis der Gruppenarbeit zu stellen und ihn aus seinem Medium, der Bewegung heraus zu erneuern. [...] Durch Aufbauten, Kulissen, raumbestimmendes Requisit [... und ...] formal betontes Kostüm [...] würde das Entstehen des imaginären Raumes unmöglich gemacht. [...] [Die Musik] trägt nicht Inhalte und Bedeutungen; [sie] ist sich selbst genug [...] und bedarf keiner Ausdeutung.“ Die Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz – M O T I O N, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion. The Manifest was written retrospectively, probably in 1964. Personal interview with Hellmut Gottschild, 12.2.2015.

<sup>20</sup> *Göttinger Tageblatt* (9.10.62). Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>21</sup> I've become aware of MOTION Berlin's link to the Zero Art Movement by reading Christine Käppeler's recent article about the visual artist Mary Bauermeister and her

In 1962, when MOTION Berlin started its career, Germany's large pre-war network of free dance schools had long been dismantled by the Nazis. The major cultural institutions on the other hand were still largely staffed with personnel who had been appointed by – or lasted through – the fascist regime. After the war, and in concurrence to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's ultra-conservative government, these senior public servants proved instrumental in scaling down and restricting the country's – and especially Berlin's – once buoyant cultural scene to the sole remainder of the classical arts. In the realm of dance this meant the exclusive funding of ballet.<sup>22</sup> The opening lines of *MOTION Berlin's* manifest show the group's awareness of a coming uphill battle – but the extent of the struggle was certainly not yet clear to the young dancers.

“Despite the near impossibility of an artistic and economic existence as an independent dance company in Germany – due to the monopoly position of ballet-companies at the subsidized theaters – we founded [...] M o t i o n. Much approval – and definitely great interest and discussion – speak for the validity of this new formation.”<sup>23</sup>

Gottschild was responsible for the group's paper work and promotion. Indefatigably he wrote to theaters, schools and universities in order to arrange performances for the planned tour. Communication via letters had not been superseded by the telephone yet, and the back and forth of letters took time. His correspondence with the ballet-master Frida Holst of the local theater of Duisburg clearly illustrates the antiquated, reactionary, and elitist concepts of art the collective was up against. Gottschild and Holst had been communicating for months.<sup>24</sup> Then Holst answered in handwriting, on a postcard, dated September 3, 1962:

“I've received your program-sequence – with these “pretty interesting“ but rather suspicious titles – (“Olmosis“ for example??). Only the less educated would pretend to understand... Why not simply in German? Please send me some press reviews as soon as possible, which I now

---

connection to the movement. Christine Käppeler, „Ich bin eine Mischung aus Ordnung und Anarchie“, *der Freitag* (26.3.2015, no. 13), p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> About the dismantling of the pre-war network of free dance-schools by the National Socialists, the Nazi-regime's long lasting impact on the institutional art-world of East- and West-Germany, the ballet dominated post-war, West-German dance scene, and the conservative 50s and 60s “spirit of restoration and classicism in the arts“ see Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, pp. 173, 221, 224, 229, 248. Also: Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Crosscurrents and Influences* (New York, 2013; first edition Chur, 1995), pp. 77-136.

<sup>23</sup> „Obwohl die künstlerische wie die wirtschaftliche Existenz für eine selbständige Tanzgruppe in Deutschland nahezu unmöglich ist, da die Ballettgruppen der subventionierten Theater eine Monopolstellung einnehmen, gründeten wir [...] M o t i o n. Viel Zustimmung, in jedem Fall jedoch Interesse und Diskussion bei Publikum und Presse sprechen für die Berechtigung dieser Neugründung.“ Die Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz – M O T I O N, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>24</sup> Gottschild contacted Frida Holst with a first letter on July 16, 1962.

Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion, Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1962, A-Z

want to await before everything else [...].<sup>25</sup>

Gottschild answered defiantly defensive:

”Please allow one question: Do you still intend to help us? Your rejection of our titles scared us a bit. [...] You haven’t seen our dances yet; I’m sure you would think differently then. [...] I hope, that we can show you one day that we can dance as well. [...] We would have it much easier, if we were after effects and cheap success with the audience.“<sup>26</sup>

Their correspondence ended here. The performance never took place.

The only other house, which was willing to host the young company in 1962, was the junges theater in Göttingen. The director was the 31 years old enfant terrible Hans Gunther Klein, who in time made a name for himself for courageous theater programs. Apart from the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, his house would also be the only German theater, which repeatedly featured MOTION Berlin over the next years.<sup>27</sup>

For the next year – apart from another guest performance at the junges theater and a concert at the University of Cologne in 1963 – came nothing.<sup>28</sup> In order to make ends meet all three dancers performed as classical ensemble dancers at the Bayreuth Festival. Gottschild taught at the Mary Wigman Studio. Inge Sehnert advanced from “snack bar helper” for the US army to part time administration secretary at the Technical University Berlin. Together with her colleague Brigitta Herrmann, she had several short-term contracts as a dancer in the city’s post-war “emergency program for artists”, and danced in several other local theaters, but persistently found herself back on unemployment benefits. When things got too rough, Herrmann took on a job

---

<sup>25</sup> „Ihre Programm-Folge habe ich erhalten – mit den so „schön interessanten“, aber etwas verdächtigen Titeln – die ganz zu verstehen nur die Halbgebildeten rasch vorgeben... (z.B. „Olmose“??). Warum eigentlich nicht einfach deutsch? Senden Sie mir bitte nach Göttingen umgehend Presse, die ich nun abwarten möchte [...].“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>26</sup> „Bitte erlauben Sie mir eine Frage: Haben Sie noch die Absicht, uns zu helfen? Ihre Ablehnung unserer Tanztitel hat uns etwas erschreckt. [...] Sie haben unsere Tänze nicht gesehen; ich bin sicher Sie würden sonst anders denken. [...] Ich hoffe, wir können Ihnen einmal beweisen, dass wir auch tanzen können. [...] Wären wir auf Effekte und billige Publikumserfolge aus, wir hätten es leichter.“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>27</sup> MOTION Berlin performances at Junges Theater in Göttingen: September 12+13, 1962, May 12+13, 1963, November 9+10, 1964.

MOTION Berlin performances at Akademie der Künste in Berlin: February 8, 1964, February 4, 1966, June 23-24, 1967.

Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion

<sup>28</sup> MOTION Berlin performance at the University of Cologne: May 15, 1963.

Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

as an usher at the movies.<sup>29</sup> Gottschild continued his tireless networking. In May 1963, the former Wigman student turned journalist Gisela Asteroth saw MOTION Berlin's performances in Göttingen, was completely smitten and proposed a feature in the women's magazine *Film und Frau*<sup>30</sup>. Asteroth did not work for the magazine. But she boasted about good contacts to the new chief editor who, according to her, intended to modernize the publication, and was willing to help the group out. In preparation for the feature Asteroth asked about the young fellows' plans, dreams and aspirations.<sup>31</sup> In his answer, Gottschild echoed some of the essentialist stipulations of the company's manifest:

"Dance is movement. The form of dance is controlled movement, and the movement's value is the scale of tensions between highest, trembling hyper-tension, and complete relaxation. [...] Dance does not interpret, it represents; it does not suppose something, it is. And yet we believe, that it speaks. Through the language of movement (not through symbols or gestures which "mean" something)."

He continued in his intellectual, self-absorbed, no-nonsense manner:

"The possibly unreachable goal: Improvisation on stage. This means total reign over the instrument of the body, complete sensibility. [...] This would be pure dance, which is ethereal, when consequently executed. This would mean the triumph over composition and requires infallibility."

In the last paragraph of his letter he remembered the original question:

"Oh yes! You asked for plans. There is only one plan, or rather one hope: We dearly hope, that other, like-minded dancers will join us, we would like to introduce our ideas into group dance, widen the base of our dance, New Dance."<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Inge Sehnert's folder includes contracts as a dancer at the Bayreuther Festspiele in 1963, 1964, 1965, 1966. During a private conversation with Hellmut Gottschild and Angela Guerreiro on February 5, 2015, Gottschild reiterated his and Herrmann's participation at Bayreuth. Sehnert's contract with the US—Forces specifies "Temporary appointment from 24 Oct 61 – 23 Jan 62". Her contract with the Berlin „Notstandprogramm für Künstler“ lasts from October 1, 1963 to June 30, 1964. Her contract with the Technische Universität Berlin lasts from November 1, 1963 – December 31, 1963. According to her registration cards, Sehnert is on and off unemployment benefits from May 1960 to February 1967. For Sehnert's and Herrmann's employments at different local theaters and Herrmann's job as an usher at the Gloria Palace see also Ulrike Pinzler, „Tanz – ganz anders: Studiogruppe stellt sich in der Schaubühne vor“, *Bild-Zeitung* (Berlin) (17.4.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>30</sup> *Movie and Woman*

<sup>31</sup> Gisela Asteroth letter to Brigitta Herrmann, Inge Sehnert and Helmut Fricke Gottschild. Letter is dated May 28, 1963. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion – Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1963, A-Z

<sup>32</sup> „Tanz ist Bewegung. Die Form des Tanzes ist die kontrollierte Bewegung, der Bewegungswert, die Skala der Spannungen zwischen höchster, zitternder Überspannung



Again, the conversation continued for a couple of months. Then, on August 8, 1963, Gottschild inquired if Asteroth still intended to write the article. He proposed a meeting and asked for a quick response. Asteroth replied on August 20, her answer was evasive.<sup>33</sup> Also this feature was never realized.

To make things worse: Just a month earlier the collective had received their first scathing review in one of Germany's most prominent dance magazines, which vividly illustrates the establishment's disdain for experimental artistic expression. The article had started promisingly, but in its closing words denied the group any artistic relevance altogether:

"Their slender bodies get entangled in their own arms and legs like in creepers. They flap like caught birds. They sway back and forth like algae in stagnant waters. [...] Animal, botanical and technical movement is scanned for its potency for dance. However, they don't ever go there. [...] What "studio group for new dance MOTION Berlin" demonstrates [...], has nothing to do with art. Apparently the dancers are about the exploration of new territory, as they do in similar esoteric circles of avant-garde music [...]"<sup>34</sup>

---

und völliger Lösung. Sie ist sich selbst genug, bedarf nicht der erzählenden Handlung, braucht nicht eine Musik auszudeuten. Der Tanz deutet nicht, be-deutet, meint nicht – er ist. Und doch glauben wir, dass er spricht. Durch die Sprache der Bewegung (nicht durch Symbole oder Gesten, die etwas „meinen“). [...] Vielleicht unerreichbares Ziel: Die Improvisation auf der Bühne. Das heisst hundertprozentige Beherrschung des Instrumentes Körper, letzte Sensibilität. [...] Das wäre reiner Tanz, dem ja die Flüchtigkeit eigen ist, konsequent durchgeführt. Das hieße Überwindung der Komposition und verlangt Unfehlbarkeit. [...] Ach ja! Sie fragten nach Plänen. Es gibt nur einen Plan, besser gesagt eine Hoffnung. Wir hoffen sehr, dass sich uns andere, gleichgesinnte Tänzer anschließen werden, möchten unsere Ideen in den Gruppentanz hineinragen, die Basis unseres, des Neuen Tanzes verbreitern.“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion – Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1963, A-Z.

<sup>33</sup> "No news about our article yet; however – if anything – it was supposed to get published only after that ballet article.“ „Habe wegen unseres Artikels noch nichts gehört, weil er ja auch erst einige Zeit nach diesem Ballett-Artikel erscheinen sollte – wenn überhaupt.“ Gisela Asteroth to Hellmut Fricke Gottschild, Göttingen, 20.8.1963. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion – Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1963, A-Z.

<sup>34</sup> Heinz-Ludwig Schneiders, „Studiogruppe Berlin,“ *Tanzarchiv* (Juli 1963). „Ihre schmalen Körper verfangen sich in den eigenen Armen und Beinen wie in Schlinggewächsen. Sie flattern wie Vögel, die auf den Leim gegangen sind. Sie schwingen hin und her wie Algen in einem trägen Gewässer. [...] Tierische, pflanzliche und technische Bewegung wird abgetastet auf ihre tänzerische Potenz. Ohne dass man freilich je zum Tanz selbst vorstoßen würde. [...] Was die „Studiogruppe für neuen Tanz MOTION Berlin“ [...] demonstriert, hat nichts mit Kunst zu tun. Es geht den Tänzern offenbar um die Erschließung von Neuland wie in den vergleichbaren esoterischen Zirkeln der Avantgardemusik und Movens-Poesie.“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

## Promise

However, in 1964, things started to look up. MOTION Berlin's long awaited tours materialized, led them through several German towns and cities, and in 1965, they were invited to the International Music Biennale in Zagreb.<sup>35</sup> Actually, the debut of their German tours was sensational and one of their most enthusiastic journalistic supporters, the dance-critic Walter Kaul was jubilant about the "death of classical boredom." He expanded:

"All at once you find yourself electrified. Suddenly there were three young barefoot-dancers, who did not move long-winded and painfully along worn out tracks, but sprang rhythmically over the stage to motorizing music by Carlos Chavez and filled up the space, by organizing it through their unison movement."

[...]

"Fascinating, already, the plasticity of their original positions. [...] It's the creation of abstract art-pieces in empty space.

The trio premieres under a garbled title: Motion Berlin, studio group for new dance. More pretentious would be impossible – but they legitimize the label."

[...]

"What they do is reminiscent of the newest experiments in American absolute dance. It just seems a miracle, that this kind of avant-garde is blossoming in Berlin, which almost exclusively worships classical ballet."<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> MOTION Berlin performances in 1964: February 8, Berlin: Akademie der Künste; April 18, Berlin: Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer; June 8-12, Hanover, Braunschweig, Vechta, Osnabrück and Lüneburg: Universities and colleges; August 10, Bayreuth: Markgräfliches Opernhaus; November 9+10, Göttingen: Junges Theater; December 1+2, Munich: University.

MOTION Berlin performances in 1965: February 22, Berlin: Freie Universität; April 25, Cologne: Schauspielhaus; May 17, Zagreb: International Music Biennale; May 28, Königstein: Arbeitskreis Tanz Convention; June, Berlin: NCO-Club; September 24-29, Neheim-Hüsten, Fredeburg, Brilon: Universities and colleges. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion, Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>36</sup> „Und dann war man mit einem Mal elektrisiert: drei junge Barfuß tänzer bewegten sich plötzlich nicht umständlich und mühsam in ausgeleiterten Gleisen, sondern federten rhythmisch über die Bühne zu motorisierender Musik von Carlos Chavez und „erfüllten“ den Raum, indem sie ihn durch den Gleichklang ihrer Bewegungen gliederten. [...] Faszinierend bereits die plastischen Ausgangsstellungen [...] Im leeren Raum entstehen abstrakte Kunstwerke der Bewegung. Unter einem verquasteten Titel debütierte das Kleblatt: „Motion Berlin, Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz“. Anspruchsvoller geht es nicht – aber sie legitimieren die Etikette. [...]

Man wird an die jüngsten Experimente des amerikanischen absoluten Tanzes erinnert. Es berührt wie ein Wunder, dass dieser Avantgardismus gerade in Berlin erblühen konnte, wo in letzter Zeit ausschließlich dem Klassischen Ballett gehuldigt wurde.“ Walter Kaul, „Neue Tanzgruppe überraschte: „Motion Berlin“ – ein Künstlerkleblatt mit Zukunft,“ *Der Kurier/Der Tag* (Berlin) (10.2.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

Also the rest of the press took note, and what becomes apparent was a deep rift between ardent supporters who appreciated the group's new approaches, and fervent opponents. Attempting to veil their own conservative preoccupations, many of the reviewers turned the tables and complained about "esoteric grouchiness", "ideological gymnastics", "dances for pedestrians", or "a revolution at snail's pace", found "they don't dance" at all, and thus ignored the responsibility of their youth.<sup>37</sup> Other diehards moaned about the dancers' sober performances and serious faces, lamented that "their presentations can't be measured against the vehemence and radiance of Wigman's dances and choreographies", suggested the recitation of humorous Ringelnatz verses, or the holding of hands in order to lift the mood.<sup>38</sup> In sum MOTION Berlin's performances caused heated reaction. And they certainly did not go unnoticed.

Overlooked or rather ignored – and this also by their supporters – was the fact of their work as a collective. Hellmut Gottschild was portrayed as boss, theoretical

---

<sup>37</sup> See for example: "[...] However, they did not dance: [...] They ignored the responsibility and obligation of their class. [...] Stereotypically they repeated the 101 of positions, quoted the elders and at times even got into the vicinity of ideological gymnastics. [...]" „[...] Nur: Sie tanzten nicht: [...] Sie ignorierten Pflicht und Vorrecht ihres Jahrgangs. [...] Dafür wiederholten sie stereotyp ein kleines Einmaleins von Stellungen, zitierten die Ahnen und gerieten bisweilen sogar in die Nähe weltanschaulicher Gymnastik. [...]" „Der erste Versuch," *Der Abend* (Berlin) (20.4.1964). "They present dances for pedestrians, slow promenades from one end of the stage to the other, carefully stepping over non-existent obstacles. They writhe elaborately. The revolution creeps up at snails pace. The old song: Just a bit of publicity causes esoteric grouchiness." „Es sind Tänze für Fußgänger, die sie vorführen, langsame Promenaden von einer Seite der Bühne zur andern, ein vorsichtiges Hinwegsteigen über nicht vorhandene Hindernisse. Sie räkeln sich kompliziert. Die Revolution schleicht im Schneckentempo daher. Das alte Lied: Kaum hat man angefangen, ein bißchen vor die Öffentlichkeit zu treten, ist man auch schon esoterisch verbiestert." Klaus Geitel, „Motion" – Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz", *Die Welt* (20.4.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>38</sup> "Their presentations can't be measured against the vehemence and radiance of Wigman's dances and choreographies. [...] They behave primly and asocial, with the audience and with eachother. They almost don't touch. [...] The faces are frozen." „An der Vehemenz und der Strahlung Wigmanscher Tänze und Choreographien können ihre Darbietungen nicht gemessen werden. [...] Sie geben sich spröde, kontaktscheu, dem Publikum gegenüber und auch gegeneinander. Sie berühren sich kaum. [...] Die Gesichter sind starr." D.B., „Tanz als reines Bewegungsphänomen: Die Gruppe „Motion" stellte sich in der Freien Universität vor," *Die Welt* (25.2.1965). "Why so bitterly solemn for two hours? Mary Wigman [...] used to quote some verses by Ringelnatz, when her students descended to deeply into profundity during their improvisations." „Warum zwei Stunden lang so bitter feierlich?! Mary Wigman pflegte einst [...] Ringelnatz-Verse zu zitieren, wenn die Schüler bei ihren Improvisationen gar zu sehr in Tiefsinn versanken." G.Z., „Vorwiegend skizzenhaft," *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) (21.4.1964). Or again Klaus Geitel: "To join hands for a joint dance seems to be [...] frowned upon. Lonesomely one dances next to eachother." „Es scheint [...] verpönt, sich die Hände zu reichen zum gemeinsamen Tanz. Einsam tanzt man nebenher." Klaus Geitel „Motion" – Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz," *Die Welt* (20.4.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

mastermind and choreographer in one. Under the title of: *A brilliant ensemble: The studio group for new dance "Motion" at the PH*, the Hannover journalist Heiner M. Wingert for example wrote:

“Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, head of this Berlin-ensemble [...], together with his ladies Brigitta Herrmann and Inge Sehnert, decided to avoid any fable, drama or possible subject [...].”<sup>39</sup>

Wingert's description of the group's work processes was preceded and followed by many more, but similarly sounding, one-dimensional interpretations.<sup>40</sup> This was done

---

<sup>39</sup> „Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, der Leiter dieses Berliner Ensembles [...], hat sich mit seinen Damen Brigitta Herrmann und Inge Sehnert [...] vorgenommen, der Fabel, dem Drama, dem möglichen Sujet ganz auszuweichen [...]“ Heiner M. Wingert, „Ein glänzendes Ensemble: Die Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz „Motion“ in der PH“, *Hannoversche Presse* (10.6.1964), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>40</sup> See for example the following reviews: „This was demonstrated convincingly by Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild's „Aurus II“ (adapted from Luc Ferrari) – a solo with disposition to terpsichorean acrobatics; here the choreographically resourceful [...] head of the studio-group presented an impressively complete dance performance. His choreographic direction manifested itself at its best in “Six Little Pieces“ adapted from Arnold Schönberg and performed technically scintillating by Brigitta Herrmann and Inge Sehnert.“ „Das bewies überzeugend Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild's „Aurus II“ (nach Luc Ferrari) – ein Solo mit Neigungen zur tänzerischen Akrobatik; hier kam der choreographisch einfallsreiche [...] Leiter der Studiogruppe zu einer eindrucksvoll abgerundeten tänzerischen Leistung. Ebenso zeigte sich seine choreographische Regie in den „Sechs kleinen Stücken“ nach Arnold Schönberg, von Brigitta Herrmann und Inge Sehnert technisch ausgezeichnet geboten, von der besten Seite.“ se „Disziplin und Askese: Zum Gastspiel der Studiogruppe für neuen Tanz MOTION BERLIN im „jungen theater“ Göttingen“, *Göttinger Tagesblatt* (9.10.1962). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion. “Head of this studio-group: Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild [...]. Observing his command: Inge Sehnert [...], Brigitta Herrmann [...], Leanore Ickstadt.“ „Kopf dieser Studiogruppe: Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild [...]. Auf sein „Kommando“ hören: Inge Sehnert[...], Brigitta Herrmann [...], Leanore Ickstadt [...]“. P.A.O. „Tanz – ganz anders: Studiogruppe stellt sich in der Schaubühne vor“, *Bild-Zeitung* (Berlin), (17.4.1964), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert. “The young group around Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild danced most modern music, namely electronic and concrete.“ „Die junge Gruppe um Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild tanzte modernste Musik, nämlich elektronische und konkrete.“ „Eine künstlerische Sensation ersten Ranges“, *der Kurier* (17.4.1964), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert. “Hellmut Fricke Gottschild, since two years head of the Berlin studio-group for new dance „Motion“ [...], two ladies, Brigitta Herrmann and Inge Sehnert complement his program [...]“ „Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, seit zwei Jahren Leiter der Berliner Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz „Motion“ [...], zwei Damen Brigitta Herrmann und Inge Sehnert, ergänzen sein Programm [...]“ -gert „Endliches im Unendlichen geformt: Die Berliner Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz „Motion“ gastierte in Hannover“, *Hannoversche Rundschau* (10.6.1964), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert. “Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, actively dancing head and choreographer of the company [...]“ „Hellmut

in spite of the group's declaration of collective creational work processes.<sup>41</sup> However, the group never seems to have protested; Inge Sehnert and Brigitta Herrmann never tried to correct the picture. Only by '65 the press grudgingly stopped referring to Gottschild's imaginary leading position, exemplified by the following review:

“Hardly second to Brigitta Herrmann [...] comes Inge Sehnert, similar type. She would be the better Motion-dancer under a Motion-choreographer; only that it doesn't exist yet! Now her ostentations still appear a bit haphazard, superimposed, and then again too controlled. This is no mistake, not necessarily, but she manifests, what is missing in general: "choreography" precisely. The only man of the ensemble, honorable as its spiritus rector, and probably also responsible for the composition of the dances, appears a bit marinated – despite all his abilities.”<sup>42</sup>

In 1964, the dancer Leanore Ickstadt, one of Wigman's late US-American students, joined MOTION Berlin.<sup>43</sup> They had grown to a collective of four now. At least one critic remarked on Ickstadt's lesser capabilities, but joint creational processes and performance style seem to have remained unaffected.<sup>44</sup> As the rest of the group, Ickstadt had to supplement her income with additional work; in her case this meant leisure activities with American troops stationed in Berlin, city- and museum-tours,

---

Fricke-Gottschild, tänzerisch aktiver Leiter und Choreograph der Gruppe [...]“ se. „Bühnentanz unserer Zeit: Gastspiel der Studiogruppe für neuen Tanz MOTION BERLIN im jungen Theater“, *Göttinger Tageblatt* (18.11.1964), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>41</sup> See MOTION Berlin's manifest, footnote 20.

<sup>42</sup> „Brigitta Herrmann [...] kaum nach steht Inge Sehnert, ähnlicher Typus. Sie wäre sogar die bessere Motion-Tänzerin unter einem Motion-Choreographen; nur gibts den noch nicht! Jetzt wirken ihre Ostentationen noch ein wenig willkürlich, aufgesetzt auch manchmal und dann wieder allzu bewußt gesteuert. Das ist kein Fehler, nicht unbedingt, nur zeigt sich bei ihr heute noch am deutlichsten, was überhaupt fehlt: eben „Choreographie“. Der einzige Mann des Ensembles, als dessen spiritus rector ehrenwert, wohl auch verantwortlich für die Gestaltung der Tänze, wirkt ein bißchen mariniert – allem Können zum Trotz.“ Dietrich Steinbeck, „Dritter Abend der Gruppe Motion“, *Tanzarchiv* (Mai 1965). Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Mary Wigman's reputation had not suffered in the United States, where she was continued to be hailed as an icon. Thus the maintenance of her studio in Berlin in the 50s and early 60s, was largely due to tuition fees paid by pilgrimaging American dance students. Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*, p. 226.

<sup>44</sup> “They go easy on the legs, but the magnificently trained trunks of Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, Brigitta Herrmann, Inge Sehnert and, to lesser extent also of Leanore Ickstadt offer incredible [sights].“ „Die Gesichter sind starr. Die Beine [...] werden [...] geschont, aber Unerhörtes geben die herrlich trainierten Rumpfparten von Hellmut Fricke-Gottschild, Brigitta Herrmann, Inge Sehnert und, in geringerem Maße auch von Leanore Ickstadt.“ D.B. „Tanz als reines Bewegungsphänomen: Die Gruppe „Motion“ stellte sich in der Freien Universität vor“, *Die Welt* (25.2.1965). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

game parties.<sup>45</sup> Or as Dietrich Steinbeck, another MOTION Berlin sceptic writing for the dance-magazine *Tanzarchiv*, put it rather harshly: With the “entertainment of inferior social circles.” Steinbeck was not smitten by the performance he had witnessed, but he still conceded great talent, potential and dedication and concluded, that companies like MOTION Berlin should be “supported at all costs” to enable them to do “consistent and concentrated studio work”.<sup>46</sup> Steinbeck was not the only journalist who felt MOTION Berlin deserved some sort of financial backing. Earlier, in '64, the aforementioned Walter Kaul had pointed out to his readers, that MOTION Berlin had established itself without any means of financial assistance and called them “one of the most promising articles for export.”<sup>47</sup>

In January '65, Gottschild filed an application for financial support with the Berlin Senate for Science and Art “to rent a practicing room for the group in preparation for the guest performance at the music biennale in Zagreb (Yugoslavia).”<sup>48</sup> He mentioned the many performances and reviews of the year '64, elaborated on MOTION Berlin's lauded representations of the city at various times, pointed out that next to the Bolshoi Ballet, they were the only dance company invited to Zagreb in May, listed a selection of invited orchestras and soloists – all of world-renown –, and ended the letter with a plea for help. MOTION Berlin's correspondence folder holds no reply by the senate. In February, the journalist Georg Zivier sent off another call

---

<sup>45</sup> “Leanore Ickstadt. [...] Works as entertainer for the Americans: City-tours – museums-tours – game parties. Her slogan: “Smiling comes easier than crying!”“ „Leanore Ickstadt. [...] Arbeitet als Freizeitgestalterin bei den Amerikanern: Stadtrundfahrten – Museumsführungen – Spielabende. „Lächeln ist leichter als weinen!“ heißt ihre Losung.“ Ulrike Pinzler, „Tanz – ganz anders: Studiogruppe stellt sich in der Schaubühne vor“, *Bild-Zeitung* (Berlin)(17.4.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>46</sup> “Groups like Motion have to exist, they have to be supported at all costs. [Because so far -- ] when they don't work as teachers at colleges and do gymnastics with expectant mothers – they have to entertain inferior social circles. [...] Which hinders consistent and concentrated studio work.“ „Gruppen wie Motion muss es geben, sie sind unbedingt förderungswürdig [...] denn noch müssen sie ... ] wenn sie nicht als Pädagogen bei Volkshochschulen arbeiten und mit werdenden Müttern Gymnastik treiben“ in „inferioren Gesellschaften der Unterhaltung“ dienen. „Was an konsequenter und konzentrierter Studio-Arbeit hindert.“ Dietrich Steinbeck. „Dritter Abend der Gruppe Motion“, *Tanzarchiv* (Mai 1965). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>47</sup> “At any rate, this studio group for New Dance „Motion“, which has established itself without any support or subsidies, is one of our most promising articles for export.“ „Auf jeden Fall ist diese Studiogruppe für Neuen Tanz „Motion“, die sich hier ohne jede Unterstützung und Subvention gebildet hat, einer unserer versprechendsten Exportartikel.“ Walter Kaul. *Publikumsbeifall für die junge Studiogruppe: Motion Tänzer immer besser*. Der Kurier (Berlin) (25.4.1964). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>48</sup> „[...] finanzielle Zuwendung um einen Raum für die Probenarbeit der Gruppe zu einem Gastspiel auf der Musikbiennale Zagreb (Jugoslawien) zu mieten.“ The application to the „Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft und Kunst“ is dated January 6, 1965. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion – Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1965, A-Z.

for support in his newspaper-review of a performance.<sup>49</sup> In March, the city chose its yearly art award recipients – and again: MOTION Berlin came away empty-handed. In May, while MOTION Berlin danced to great acclaim in Zagreb, the Berlin paper *B.Z.* (Berliner Zeitung) ran a large article about the collective. It lamented the city's decision to ignore MOTION Berlin's achievements, despite the strong reactions its performances had caused among laymen and professionals alike. Foreknowingly it closed, thereby taking a dig at a spokesman of the senate, who had defended the senate's decisions with the claim of exclusive support of projects of "permanent value":

"In the art-world it usually manifests decades later what was of permanent value. These young dancers can't wait until then."<sup>50</sup>

Far away from its hometown MOTION Berlin experienced glorious moments. When the festival was over, the group received a personal letter from Josip Stojanovic, the Biennale's director himself. He wrote, probably not doubting the company's future rise to fame or, to assume the least, professional standing:

"We congratulate studio group MOTION on its special success with

---

<sup>49</sup> "These young dancers need encouragement, they deserve all support." „Man muß diese junge Tänzerschaft ermuntern, sie verdient jede Hilfe.“ Georg Zivier. „Tanz mit Distanz: „Motion“ in der Freien Universität“, *Der Tagesspiegel* (25.2.1965). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>50</sup> "Some weeks ago, the Berlin Arts Awards were proclaimed. "Motion" – studio group for new dance – came away empty handed. It would have been indeed justifiable to decorate them with a newcomer award. [...] Some defend them ardently, others resent them. A controversy which has reached even the venerable guild of dance critics. [...] The music biennale in Zagreb began on wednesday. Group "Motion" was officially invited – next to the Bolshoi Ballet of Moscow. [...] However, this has not received official approval yet. Due to their difficult financial situation we recommended they turn to the lottery [...]. An official spokesperson for the senate whom they had approached for help indicated it would be pointless: The lottery's provinces are of "permanent values" only. However, in the art-world it usually shows not until decades later what was of permanent value. These young dancers can't wait until then." „Vor wenigen Wochen wurden die Berliner Kunstpreise vergeben. „Motion“ – die Studiogruppe für neuen Tanz – ging leer aus. Dabei wäre es durchaus gerechtfertigt gewesen, sie mit einem Nachwuchspreis zu dekorieren. [...] Die einen verteidigen sie glühend, die anderen lehnen sie ab. Ein Meinungsstreit, der sogar die hochehrwürdige Gilde der Tanzkritiker erfaßt hat. [...] Am Mittwoch begann in Zagreb die Musikbiennale. Die Gruppe „Motion“ wurde dazu offiziell eingeladen – neben dem Moskauer Bolschoi-Ballett. [...] Offizielle Anerkennung hat dies allerdings noch nicht gefunden. Wir empfahlen ihnen, sich wegen ihrer mißlichen Finanzlage an das Lotto zu wenden [...]. Ein offizieller Senatssprecher, den sie deshalb um Rat fragten, bedeutete ihnen jedoch, es sei völlig zwecklos: Das Lotto sei nur für „bleibende Werte“ zuständig. Nun zeigt sich in der Kunst immer erst nach einigen Jahrzehnten, was von bleibendem Wert war. Und so lange können diese jungen Tänzer nicht mehr warten.“ Rita Pessler, „Barfuß in die Kunst: Berliner Tanzgruppe „Motion“ bei der Musikbiennale in Zagreb“, *B.Z.* (Berlin) (14.5.1965). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

its performance during the Muzicki Biennale. Serious art and youthful freshness enchanted the attending audience. Warm regards to all members of the group and with the best wishes for further development and best success.<sup>51</sup>

## Disillusion

One would have thought, that after the busy years from '64 to '65, the invitation to Zagreb, and the many emotional reviews, the situation would have changed for the better, but 1966 was a slow year once again, with only 3 performances and a rather negative press.<sup>52</sup> The following critique is symptomatic for its patronizing stand, and illustrates its unwillingness to register – or value – a new approach to dance altogether.

”They wanted “to show the beauty of the dancing human being, even if he dances differently.“ This is ardent German adolescent’s philosophy. Abstract dance needs form, tension, dynamic and technique. But only a few primitive choreographic forms and interesting movements were detectable. Technique, dynamic and tension were missing completely. [...] The dancers didn’t stride over the stage, but traipsed about, as if on a street. They didn’t dance for the audience, but for themselves. But stagecraft can only persist in dialogue with the audience. It’s sad, one has to point out these basic prerequisites.<sup>53</sup>

To make ends meet, Inge Sehnert took a contract as a dancer for ballet performances during an international lingerie fair in Cologne. The engagement with the underwear manufacturer Alex Rink stipulated the attire of the company’s

---

<sup>51</sup> „Wir gratulieren der Studiogruppe MOTION zu dem besonderen Erfolg welchen sie anlässlich ihres Auftrittes im Rahmen der Muzicki Biennale errungen hat. Seriöse Kunst und jugendliche Frische begeisterten das anwesende Publikum. Herzliche Grüsse allen Mitgliedern der Gruppe mit den allerbesten Wünschen zur weiteren Entfaltung und zu bestem Erfolg.“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion Folder: Korrespondenz „Gruppe Motion“, Gottschild, 1965, A-Z

<sup>52</sup> MOTION Berlin performances in 1966: February 4, Berlin: Akademie der Künste; May 22, Bielefeld: Theater am Alten Markt; June 2, Wesel: Bühnenhaus. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion, Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>53</sup> „Sie wollen die „Schönheit des tanzenden Menschen vorführen, auch wenn er anders tanzt“. Das ist innige deutsche Pubertätsphilosophie. Abstrakter Tanz benötigt Form, Spannung, Dynamik und Technik. Davon waren jedoch nur einige primitive choreographische Formen und vereinzelt interessante Bewegungen zu entdecken. Technik, Dynamik und Spannung fehlten vollkommen. [...] Die Tänzer schritten nicht über die Bühne sondern sie latschten wie auf der Straße. Sie tanzen nicht für das Publikum, sondern für sich. Aber Bühnenkunst kann nur im Dialog mit dem Publikum bestehen. Es ist traurig, auf solche Grundvoraussetzung hinweisen zu müssen.“ Calmet „Pubertätsphilospie“. *Spandauer Volksblatt* (6.2.1966). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.



underwear, bodices and dressing gowns on stage and included “on demand presentation to individual customers between performances”.<sup>54</sup>

In the winter of '66, the collective moved into their first private rehearsal space in an old factory by the wall in Kreuzberg. Thus also spearheading Kreuzberg's development into an art enclave, the prints of negatives show the dance-pioneers with rather subdued expressions in gloves and hoodies, handling huge wooden sheets in an obviously cold loft with a tiny oven, and a floor covered in saw dust. Again it was all do-it-yourself: They laid their own dance-floor – the city did not partake in the costs.<sup>55</sup>

In a later interview Gottschild related that this was the time, the group lost confidence. Political unrest and upheavals worldwide, the escalation of the war in Vietnam, the Cold War – in Berlin felt acutely – were stirring the youth. After the conservatism and the paralysis of the post-war years the atmosphere around the collective got more and more politicized. The radically anarchist and pacifist Living Theater moved from the US into exile to Berlin, demonstrating how to merge life and work into one, and according to Gottschild “hit like a bomb“. Suddenly MOTION Berlin's formulated dogma of cool formalism, un-opinionated and content free creation of pure movement, which was open to individual interpretation and which had been an answer to the metaphorical overload of prior decades, seemed irrelevant and fainthearted. The dancers felt their self-absorbed concentration on aesthetics was put to shame. They started to question their own paradigms and found themselves in a state of disorientation.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> The contract lasted for 4 days from September 14-18, 1966. The contract engaged Sehnert as dancer for “ballet performances during the International Lingerie Salon in Cologne.[...] During the ballet-scenes [space for employees name] wears underwear and lingerie, as well as the company's dressing gowns and is furthermore urged to show them to individual customers between performances and on demand of the employer.“ Der Vertrag verpflichtet Inge Sehnert als Tänzerin für „Ballettvorführungen anlässlich des Internationalen Miedersalons in Köln. [...] Während der Ballettszenen trägt [Leerstelle für Arbeitnehmer] Wäsche und Miedermodelle, sowie Morgenmäntel des Unternehmers und ist auch angehalten, diese auf Wunsch des Unternehmers zwischen den einzelnen Vorführungen evtl. einzelnen Kunden vorzuführen.“ Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>55</sup> Prints of negatives in Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion. Always the attentive observer, the journalist Walter Kaul wrote in October or November: “Quietly and without subsidies Motion builds its own studio in a vacated factory by the the wall at Leuschnerdamm 37, in Kreuzberg. What a strange pull – Kreuzberg turns more and more into an eldorado for artists.“ „In aller Stille und ohne Subvention errichtet sich Motion in einer leeren Fabrikhalle an der Mauer, Leuschnerdamm 37 in Kreuzberg, ein eigenes Studio. Kreuzberg wird, welch merkwürdige Anziehungskraft, immer mehr zum Künstlerdorado.“ Walter Kaul, „Schließt das Mary-Wigman-Studio?“ [Der Kurier?]. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 171 / Inge Sehnert.

<sup>56</sup> “Zagreb was the pinnacle. Then came a time in which made us loose confidence. Our political conception of ourselves collapsed. The Vietnam war had caused great opposition. Then the Living-Theater came to Germany. That hit like a bomb. There [was] a group [...], for whom life and work coincided. We felt ashamed that we had

At that crucial moment the writer, musician, and actor Manfred Fischbeck joined the company and together they developed one of the first multi-media projects in Germany: *Countdown for Orpheus*. Miraculously the production received financial support by the city. Dancers Kathy Pira, Irene Sieben, and Gwat Me Tan rounded up the ensemble, Thomas Kessler composed the music. The piece was a radical departure from their prior dogma of dance as autonomous and message-free discipline and incorporated theater, dance, music, film and poetry. The reception was a disaster. Georg Zivier, writer of many a sympathetic article, wondered how he was supposed to concentrate on a couple of dancers behind a curtain AND two movie screens, with only two eyes.

“Three choreographers worked at this mixed media performance entitled „Countdown for Orpheus“ – and still, it was one too few: Namely a practitioner, who would have enlightened our young dance company [about the fact] that man has only two eyes, which unfortunately can be directed into one perspective only. Nobody can absorb the course of events on two movie screens and the dancing movement behind a transparent curtain simultaneously.”<sup>57</sup>

Klaus Geitel, whose reviews of MOTION Berlin had never been fussy, resumed as follows:

“A hodgepodge of highbrow truisms. One hour of swirling gravitas. Lacquered profoundness, fashionably garnished. Rumbling uprightness. A something without courage, without temperament, without lightening. Unhurried vanguard.”<sup>58</sup>

---

aestheticized. We wanted to be more direct. On top of that many friends said to us: “How can you still dance? [...] The only thing one can do [these days] is to take to the streets.” „Zagreb war der Höhepunkt. Danach kam eine Zeit, in der wir alle sehr verunsichert wurden. Unser politisches Selbstverständnis brach zusammen. Der Vietnamkrieg hatte eine starke Opposition gefordert. Und dann kam das Living-theatre nach Deutschland. Das schlug ein wie eine Bombe. [...]D]a [war] eine Gruppe [...], für die Leben und Arbeit zusammenfielen. Wir schämten uns, dass wir ästhetisiert hatten. Wir wollten direkter sein. Und dann kam dazu, dass viele Freunde sagten: „Wie könnt ihr überhaupt noch tanzen? [...] Man kann nur noch auf die Straße gehen.““ Helmut Gottschild in *tanzaktuell*, September 1987 (vol 2, no 8), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> „An der Mischdarbietung mit dem Titel „Countdown für Orpheus“ haben drei Choreographen gearbeitet – und immer noch einer zu wenig: Ein Praktiker nämlich, der unsere junge Tanzgruppe darüber aufgeklärt hätte, daß der Mensch nur zwei Augen hat, die mangelhafterweise nur in eine einzige Blickrichtung lenkbar sind. Niemand kann zugleich die Hergänge auf zwei Filmschirmen aufnehmen und dazu noch die tänzerischen Bewegungen hinter einem transparenten Vorhang.“ Georg Zivier und Wolfgang G. Burde. „Tiefsinnige Bewegungsstile: Tanzgruppe „Motion“ in der Akademie der Künste“, *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) (24.6.1967). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>58</sup> „Ein Sammelsurium hochgestochener Platitüden. Einstündiges Bedeutungsgewaber. Lackierter Tiefsinn, modisch garniert. Gerumpel der Bravheit. Eine Sache ohne Schneid, ohne Temperament, ohne Blitz. Betuliche Avantgarde.“ Klaus Geitel, „Ohne Schneid und

All critics felt overwhelmed by multiple settings, intellectual bombast, and ideological pretension.<sup>59</sup>

In the end the dancers were left to their own devices once again. The situation got so bleak, that the studio had to be closed. Gottschild lost all hope:

”I did not see any potential for the further development of our dance in Germany. We had freed movement of its context [...] But there was no environment for a new language.”<sup>60</sup>

## Re-Location and -Formation

So in 1968, Helmut Gottschild, Bettina Herrmann, and Manfred Fischbeck immigrated to America. Set up camp in Philadelphia. And performed at Judson Church in New York, the birthplace of the Judson Dance Theater. They performed *Countdown for Orpheus*, in 1969. With a different ensemble and a tightened concept. The group was warmly, no, enthusiastically received. Jack Anderson for *Dance Magazine* wrote:

“And an exciting debut it was. [...] The choreography [...] favors hard-driving, torso generated movements. Yet this gutsy style is totally divorced from subjectivist or expressionist preoccupations. [...] According to the program, the Gruppe hopes to establish a company in Philadelphia. Good luck to them there. And may they come back soon to dance in New York.”<sup>61</sup>

---

Temperament: „Gruppe Motion“ mit „Count down für Orpheus“ in der Akademie“, *Die Welt* (Berlin) (23.6.1967). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.  
<sup>59</sup> In the archive in Cologne I found 3 reviews of the performance (which only showed in Berlin). All three of them are negative. Georg Zivier for example continued: “Exercises. The whole thing. Profound coasting, which was over, when it stopped.” „Etüdenarbeit das Ganze. Tiefsinniger Leerlauf, der zu Ende war, als aufgehört wurde.“ Georg Zivier und Wolfgang G. Burde, „Tiefsinnige Bewegungsstile: Tanzgruppe „Motion“ in der Akademie der Künste“, *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin) (24.6.1967). Marcus Sobotta wrote: “The overload with codes and more interpretations made the „Countdown for Orpheus“ endeavor into a murky, artsy dead end enterprise, which fascinates formally, but nothing more.“ „Die Überfrachtung mit Chiffren und anderen Interpretationen macht das Unternehmen „Countdown für Orpheus“ zu einem undurchsichtigen, kunstspielerischen Sackgassenunternehmen, das zwar formal fasziniert, aber nicht mehr.“ Marcus Sobotta, „Countdown endet in der Sackgasse: Die Tanzgruppe „Motion“ in der Akademie“, *Spandauer Volksblatt* (Berlin) (24.6.1967). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>60</sup> „In Deutschland sah ich keine Möglichkeit der Weiterentwicklung unseres Tanzes. Wir hatten die Bewegung von ihrer inhaltlichen Besetzung befreit [...]. Aber das Umfeld für eine neue Sprache bestand nicht.“ Helmut Gottschild interview, *tanzaktuell*, September 1987 (vol 2, no 8), p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Jack Anderson, “Gruppe Motion Berlin-Judson Memorial Church-January 13, 1969“ in *Dance Magazine*, March 1969. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

Also the New York critics Anna Kisselgoff and Deborah Jowitt raved about the dancers and the particular way they moved:

“Its three German founders [...] offered a display of strength, discipline and technique seen only in major American dance troupes and not consistently in them.”<sup>62</sup>

“Last week a group called Gruppe Motion Berlin blew into Judson Church [...] What’s interesting about the group is the way they move. The form of their dances is open, cool, jagged, but their dancing is so full-blooded that, watching them, you are often on the edge of your seat with a kind of sympathetic kinetic tension. [...] Their movement involves a use of the torso as a centrifuge to whip the limbs around. This way of moving was once a vital tenet of the so-called modern dance, but it has all but vanished.”<sup>63</sup>

About the piece itself, which had been ripped apart by Germany’s critics, and ultimately led to the group’s emigration, they wrote:

“The program, „Countdown for Orpheus“ And „Talk,“ may well have been a case of déjà vu for those familiar with German modern-dance tradition, but in terms of the directions of both the avant-garde and more traditional schools in American dance, it ran clearly if interestingly against the local grain. [...]he group’s style [...] produced a level of intensity that was always powerful in itself, but not always matched by the inventiveness of the choreography.”<sup>64</sup>

“[...] Of the two dances the group offered, I found the long „Countdown for Orpheus“ the more satisfying. [...] No single choreographer is credited with the dance, and indeed you feel that no arbitrary decisions or desires for startling contrast cut into its progression. The dance seems to evolve and develop into an organic way – as an improvisation would [...] .A New York dancer in the audience, exhilarated just by the power of the dancing, said that seeing the group was like a taste of wine after a long diet of cool water.”<sup>65</sup>

Later that year, by then settled in Philadelphia and with a teaching post at Temple University, Gottschild wrote a letter to Berlin dance-critic and early MOTION Berlin supporter Walter Kaul:

---

<sup>62</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, „German-Led Troupe Gives Dance Recital“ in *The New York Times* (14.01.1969), p. 36, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>63</sup> Deborah Jowitt, „Hot Cool/Cold Heat“, *The Village Voice* (23.01.1969), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>64</sup> Kisselgoff, „German-Led Troupe“, 36. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>65</sup> Jowitt, „Hot Cool/Cold Heat“, Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion. Unfortunately there are no videos of neither the Berlin nor the New York performances of „Countdown for Orpheus“, as Hellmut Gottschild assured me in the prior mentioned conversation on February 5, 2015.

”Attached you find our New Yorker reviews from January ‘69. We had been a bit fearful, expecting rather cool or snobby reactions from the avant-garde spoiled audience of Judson Church. The opposite was true. We rarely performed in front of such a spontaneous audience.“

A description of the new material (which included a central stage within the audience) and a planned tour through the United States followed and Gottschild ended the letter with refreshed hopes to perform back home:

“Of course we would love to perform in Berlin, the city which had such great difficulty to acknowledge our work officially. Could you give us an advice how to approach this?”<sup>66</sup>

Group Motion’s correspondence folder holds no reply to Gottschild’s letter.

In the outcome Group Motion returned to Berlin only in 1975. By then Helmut Gottschild had split from the company. He had had his fill of multi-media performances, and returned to his roots and initial fascination with abstract movement with the establishment of Zero Moving Dance Company in 1971. The remaining dancers of Group Motion, which was then directed by Brigitta Herrmann and Manfred Fischbeck, stuck to the new concept. They had been welcomed in Philadelphia with a spirit of openness and eager curiosity not experienced before. Group Motion’s studio on South Street – which also served as their living quarters and was open to experiments of all sorts – became a legendary institution. And with their Friday night workshops, which have been running since over 40 years, and are open to dancing professionals and adventurous non-dancers alike, they have developed a most loyal following.<sup>67</sup>

When Group Motion finally did return to their city of origin with *Crossing the Great Stream*, the German press reservedly echoed old resentments:

”Quite strange, what the dancers of Group Motion from Philadelphia are doing. Their diligence and devotion compel respect.”<sup>68</sup>

“The dancers [...] impress with their physical discipline and with a few

---

<sup>66</sup> „Anliegend finden Sie die Rezensionen unserer New Yorker Vorstellungen vom Januar 69. Vor diesen hatte uns ein wenig gebangt, wir hatten eine kühle oder sogar snobistische Reaktion des avantgardegewohnten Publikums in Judson Church erwartet. Das Gegenteil war der Fall. Wir haben selten eine so spontan reagierende Zuschauerschaft gehabt. [...] Natürlich würden wir nur zu gern in Berlin auftreten, in der Stadt, wo man sich an offizieller Stelle so schwer tat, unsere Arbeit anzuerkennen. Können Sie uns raten, welchen Weg wir gehen könnten. Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>67</sup> <http://groupmotion.org/history-and-description/> (last accessed March 24, 2015),

<sup>68</sup> „Durchaus eigenartig, was die Tänzer der Gruppe „Motion“ aus Philadelphia so machen. Der Fleiß und die Hingabe, mit denen sie ihre Arbeit tun, nötigen Bewunderung ab.“ Frank Pauli, „Immer an der Welle lang... Fluß ohne Wiederkehr: „Motion“ in der Akademie“, *Der Abend* (Berlin) (29.5.1975). Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

plastic choreographical structures of charming pantomimic poetry. The distance though between immediately intelligible, expressive body language to gymnastic is often far too short.<sup>69</sup>

None of the newspapers mentioned MOTION Berlin's struggle and final defeat in Berlin a decade ago. And whereas the *Morgenpost* at least mentioned Group Motion's years of Wigman training, Frank Pauli of the Berlin newspaper *Der Abend*, did not waste a single word about Group Motion's Berlin origins.<sup>70</sup>

MOTION Berlin had probably made the right decision to leave.

## Continuation

After retiring from his teaching post at Temple University and after separating from Zero Moving Dance Company, Helmut Gottschild continued to perform with his wife, dancer, writer and cultural critic Brenda Dixon Gottschild.<sup>71</sup> He still lives in Philadelphia.

Manfred Fischbeck is still the artistic director of Group Motion.

Brigitta Herrmann co-directs Group Motion's workshop. In 1988 she founded Ausdruckstanz Dance Company, in honor of the legacy of Mary Wigman.<sup>72</sup>

Inge Sehnert remained in Germany. In 2013 she acted as artistic advisor for the reconstruction of Mary Wigman's choreography for *The Rite of Spring*. Sehnert has worked with Pina Bausch, directed several companies and run the dance studio Tanzraum from 1982-2003. She lives in Köln.<sup>73</sup>

In 1978, Tanzfabrik Berlin opened its doors in Kreuzberg, the quarter in which MOTION Berlin briefly had its first studio. Its story is delightfully recreated in the book

---

<sup>69</sup> „Die [...] Tänzer [...] beeindruckten vor allem durch ihre körperliche Disziplin und durch einige plastische Choreographiegebilde von reizvoller pantomimischer Poesie. Doch der Weg von der unmittelbar einleuchtenden, ausdrucks geladenen Körpersprache zur Turnübung ist häufig nur allzu kurz.“ „Wasserspiel auf dem trockenen“, *Berliner Morgenpost* (31.5.1975), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>70</sup> “This dance company, which grew out of the Berlin Wigman-school and now settled in Philadelphia, attracted special attention because it claims to have merged dance movement, music, films, slides, video-clips and lighting to a distinct form of total theater.“ „Besonderes Interesse zog diese, aus der Berliner Wigman-Schule hervorgewachsene, jetzt im amerikanischen Philadelphia angesiedelte Tanzgruppe auf sich, weil sie propagiert, die „Integration von tänzerischer Bewegung, Musik, Filmen, Dias, Video-Bändern und Beleuchtung zu einer eigenen Form totalen Theaters vollzogen“ zu haben. „Wasserspiel auf dem trockenen“, *Berliner Morgenpost* (31.5.1975), Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln - Bestand 210 / Group Motion.

<sup>71</sup> <http://bdixongottschild.com/> (last accessed March 24, 2015)

<sup>72</sup> <http://groupmotion.org/leaders/> (last accessed March 24, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.mediantics.com/sehnert/tanze.htm> (last accessed March 25, 2015).

*Tanzfabrik*, edited by Claudia Feest.<sup>74</sup> Irene Sieben, who danced with MOTION Berlin in *Countdown for Orpheus*, wrote a text about the first two decades of this alternative and utopian living-, art- and dance mecca, which by then clearly paralleled, corresponded and intertwined with the story and the legacies of the Judson dancers of New York. Her words encouraged me to believe, that maybe I was not completely off the track with my initial allusion about a connection between all of these people and their creative outputs.<sup>75</sup> Sieben pointed out, that two American students of the original MOTION Berlin dancers were driving forces in the establishment of Tanzfabrik Berlin: Christine Vilardo and Jacalyn Carley. Vilardo had taken dance classes with Hellmut Gottschild at Temple University in Philadelphia and until her move to Germany, co-directed Zero Moving Dance Company. Jacalyn Carley was instructed by Brigitta Herrmann, and then danced with Group Motion in Philadelphia and Berlin. Vilardo and Carley weaved together the legacies of Wigman and MOTION with the newest American techniques popularized by the Judson Dance Theater, namely Contact Improvisation and Body Mind Centering. However, the influence of the MOTION Berlin dancers on this Judsonesque dance project did not stop here. Dieter Heitkamp, another founding member of Tanzfabrik took a workshop with Hellmut Gottschild in 1979. Fred Holland, who for a short time lived with the collective in Berlin, had danced with Zero Moving Dance Company. Tonio Guerra had danced with Group Motion and gave classes at Tanzfabrik Berlin. And Leanore Ickstadt – the American dancer, who had joined MOTION Berlin in 1964 – passed through Tanzfabrik as an instructor. The list could go on and on.

## Conclusion

Back in the 60s, MOTION Berlin's communicator Hellmut Gottschild had steadfastly explained Group Motion's concepts and ideas to prospective theaters and the press. In comparison to the postulations of the Judson Dance Theater, Gottschild's lines were tame. In her introduction to the *Life Legacy Project: Correspondences between German Contemporary Dance and Judson Dance Theater Movement*, Karen Schaffmann pointed out: "Judson was a challenge to the status quo, an avant-garde movement that radically shifted perceptions of dance-making." Sifting through Gottschild's correspondences, we never got the impression, MOTION Berlin's dancers purposely intended to challenge the status quo. Not when Gottschild expressed his hope to prove to ballet-master Frieda Holst, that they "can [seriously] dance", nor when he expanded on their highbrow ideas about pure dance to the journalist Gisela Asteroth. These three young dancers seem to have cared about the opinion of the establishment, and they seem to have yearned for its recognition in exchange for their hard and honing body-work. Unthinkable, that at this early stage MOTION Berlin would have incorporated non-dancers in their performances as for example Yvonne Rainier did, unthinkable, that they would have stripped all of their artistic virtuosity from their performances as for example Steve Paxton had. In the 60's, MOTION Berlin had no intentions to completely break down the barrier between audience and performer, to radically democratize or rewrite the process of creation or to formulate socio-political demands. However, later on, in their Philadelphia productions, they did all of the above. In a recent article in the dance magazine *Tanz*,

---

<sup>74</sup> Claudia Feest, ed. *Tanzfabrik: Ein Berliner Modell im Zeitgenössischen Tanz, 1978-1998*, Berlin: 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Sieben, *20 Jahre Tanzfabrik*, p. 12-20.

set designer, dancer, and then Berlin resident Ric Schachtebeck describes how Group Motion's guest performance *Crossing the Great Stream* of '75 had had great impact on his personal career, because "never before had the dividing line between auditorium and stage seemed so open."<sup>76</sup> Schachtebeck followed Group Motion to the United States and he reveled in the company's exceptionally free approach to dance and their eminent position even within the artistic and experimental cosmos of South Street in Philadelphia in the 70s.

MOTION Berlin did not seek confrontation. Fueled by the Zero art movement and further artistic kindred spirits like John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Robert Rauschenberg, but largely disconnected of an international arts-scene, MOTION Berlin had incorporated and continued many of the relevant, cutting-edge propositions of the contemporary Western art-world. Radical was their consequent and highly disciplined pursuit of their visions for dance. Outcome was a cool melange between current modern minimalist trends, Wigman's expressionism and hints of pop art, which Germany's press critics and cultural commissioners refused to support. The group proposed revolutionary goals like the end of composition, or improvisation on stage. They yearned for a creative space and they had hoped to create a movement. However, contrary to the growing spirit of the 60s, loud, attention-grabbing actions were not their style, at least not in the beginning. I always wonder, what an enhancement of their base, what an increase in numbers of dancers, what a free and autonomous location (away from the Wigman studio rooms which they had at their disposal in the early years), and what a constant exchange of new ideas could have set in motion back then, in the sixties.

In the end, the examination of MOTION Berlin's often brutal reviews shows, that they did challenge the status quo with their work, intended or not. To make and create message free dances after the overkill of the political propaganda machines of the prior decades was a strong statement in itself. Could they have been shunned in Germany due to their bond to Nazi-collaborator Mary Wigman? Were they warmly welcomed in the United States, because there, across the pond, there was no awareness of Wigman's entanglement with Hitler's regime? While it is true that Ausdruckstanz or expressionist dance had never lost its lure and following in the United States, it's none of the above. The American reviews show, that in the States, Group Motion's performances were seen as something refreshingly new, just lending from Modern and Abstract dance. MOTION Berlin on the other hand had departed from Wigman's style already in the sixties. Also none of the German reviewers had ever decried MOTION Berlin's lineage to Wigman. Rather to the contrary: they mourned the fact, that MOTION Berlin did not repeat the same old, same old. They seem to have missed it. They did not want to deal with something new, to associate freely, to let their imagination roam. They wanted to be taken by their hands, as they had been in the decades before. They were not ready for it, and they did not understand it. Only in the late 70s, in conjunction with a new generation of press critics and cultural representatives, Berlin's dance-scene started to change

---

<sup>76</sup> "The performance affected me greatly, because never before I had seen the dividing line between auditorium and stage so permeable." „Die Vorstellung traf mich mit großer Wucht, denn nie zuvor war mir die Trennlinie zwischen Zuschauerraum und Bühne so durchlässig erschienen.“ Ric Schachtebeck, „Westfenster“, *Tanz* (November 2014), 56-59, p.56.



and open up space for unconventional artistic creations. Until then Berlin's talent had to go elsewhere.<sup>77</sup>

Thomas Kessler, Group Motion's composer for „Countdown for Orpheus“, brought the tragedy of *MOTION Berlin's* early years aptly to the point:

”Group Motion was an extraordinarily courageous and exciting ensemble that consistently tried to and followed its own path. [...] If they had been able to stay in Berlin, they would have become really important. [ ... T] hey were almost forced to emigrate. But they really should have been able to stay in this city.”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Illustrated also by the biography of Mary Bauermeister, the Zero art movement affiliated artist, mentioned before in footnote 21. Also Bauermeister has recently been “re-discovered” in Germany, she had left for New York in 1962. According to her “something new was not denigrated in the US [then]. There pioneering spirit had been valued.” Käppeler, “Ich bin eine Mischung...“, p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> Feliciano, *Expressive Roots*, p. 4.

In a recent article about the legendary post-modern dance company Trisha Brown, the dance critic Dorion Weickmann calls it the “irony of history“, that once again generations of dancers find refuge within the cathedrals of the ballet: They are the only institutions who have the necessary funds to buy and store, conserve and re-edit the vast archives of the contemporary dancers of the late 20th century. Thus the Parisian Opera, the Bavarian State-Ballet, as well as the Ballet am Rhein have supplemented their repertoire with the artistic remains of these rebels of late 20th century. Sounds familiar? Weickmann, Dorion. „Unterschlupf beim Erzfeind: Das letzte Berliner Gastspiel der legendären Trisha Brown Company wirft die Frage auf: Wer erbt im Tanz die Postmoderne?“ *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (28.4.2015), p.13.