Springback Annual 2020



advancing european dance

Springback Magazine

advancing european dance

Move Meet Feel Think Do

Springback is more than a magazine. It is part of a wider network that advances thinking and communication about current contemporary dance across Europe, connecting artists, programmers, researchers, thinkers and audiences with dance practices.

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A virus in the system

Covid-19 in 2020 is prising reality from normality and exposing the workings and malfunctions of our current systems. What thoughts and feelings does it raise within our Springback network?

While preparing this second edition of the Springback Annual for print, I looked at its pages and felt a rush of scrambled emotions: pride, fear, wonder, nostalgia, grief, hope.

Springback is a unique project, drawing upon a Europe-wide network of contributors to bear witness to the mixed and multiple currents of contemporary dance across the continent – particularly its independent sector. Many streams, not mainstream, I like to say. To leaf through the Annual is to form a composite, flickbook portrait of a year's worth of performance – mostly live, but also on screen.

This year, though, ends at a very particular moment: spring 2020. Suddenly, that portrait has acquired a bright patina of nostalgia, as if caught in a camera flash just before things went dark. It is a pre-coronavirus picture. How vivid it looks on these pages. And how startling that we had taken the camera's flare for natural daylight, its lens for reality.

Habitually, we treat reality and normality as if they were much the same. This crisis has prised them apart. The unimagined has become real, normality delusional. What does that fissure reveal to us? As the flash fades, what do our eyes see as they adjust to the new ambience? What values do we find ourselves discovering – or doubting – or ditching? What aspects of normality might we not want to return to, of reality that we might want to keep?

In the midst of a crisis, it is hard to answer our own questions: we have to wait and see. Nevertheless, it remains valuable to register this moment – for now, and for posterity.

In that spirit, we have drawn upon our strongest asset – our international network – to build another composite portrait in the new light we are living in. Our guidelines: don't scramble to report on online offerings and digital repurposing: there's more than enough of that already. Rather than struggle for answers, let us focus on thoughts and feelings, and see what emerges. Choose something that matters, no matter if it seems small or insignificant.

You can read the texts that did emerge in the following pages, prefacing this year's Annual. By starting rather than ending with the crisis, we deliberately place the Annual's bright, pre-coronavirus picture within a frame we had not seen then; but is here, now.

A virus in the system can provoke markedly different outcomes. A recovery. A collapse. Or a change in the system itself. What will the future bring, both within the field of dance and in the wider world? We do not know. But I think we do know, collectively, that if it is just a return to normal, something is wrong. There is hope in that.



Sanjoy Roy
Editor, Springback Magazine


Berlin, Germany

Fallow season

As the dance world grinds to a halt, with rehearsals and performances cancelled worldwide in a matter of days, dance artists have instantly moved online, posting videos of previous performances, and teaching repertoire or offering classes via Zoom. Old habits of producing, publicising and promoting work are carrying on automatically, because what else is there to do right now? We are manically trying to remain active, productive, relevant even, in a situation where our very identity, based on performance, contact, public communion, has become almost meaningless overnight.

But a period of stillness will inevitably come, where we will be forced to reassess, rediscover and eventually restart. We will have to submit ourselves to the *nothing* before we can start building *something* to take its place.

And maybe that season of lying fallow will give way to more fertile ground. For some time, we can't measure our achievement by volume of output. We can no longer find meaning in the prestige of large-scale performances and international touring, and we will not be working with the immediate aim of being observed and applauded. Once all those trappings are gone, what kernels remain? When the time comes to regrow, those might be good seeds to start from.

David Pallant


Budapest, Hungary

I hate dance recordings

It's funny how in pre-pandemic times so many of us complained about not having enough time for things we'd love to do – and now, when some of us have more time than we ever hoped for, we just want our 'normal' lives back. Half the world has moved online, so that we don't have to miss our yoga class, our favourite takeout, and yes, our regular supply of dance shows.

Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for the chance to see shows that I wouldn't be able to see otherwise. Still, whenever I watch dance recordings, I spend half of the time cringing and cursing. During my first days of self-isolation I rewatched L-E-V's *Love Chapter 2*, which I was lucky enough to have seen live. This is a piece with an incredible sense of space, meticulous structure, with the six dancers moving together like a living organism. Yet, there was hardly a moment where I was able to see all six of them, or at least one of them in full. Instead, I saw torsos, pretty hands or funny facial expressions filling the screen.

I want to choose my angle, my perspective. I can't wait to be back in the theatre.

Lena Megyeri



Glasgow, Scotland

Zero contact everything

I'm trying to think of the last person I touched. It could have been my best friend Chris, after she took the decision to cancel a show that had been months in the making. I felt her disappointment and uncertainty, but had no clue what to say. I put my hand on her back and rested my chin on her shoulder, and that took the place of dialogue. Touch is our primary language of compassion; a pat on the back, a hand on the arm. What does compassion look like in a lockdown?

I'm trying to think of the last person that touched me. Everything is zero contact now. Contactless payment, contact-free supermarket delivery, two metres of personal space at all times. We've rapidly internalised how dangerous it is to touch one another. Our bodies, healthy though they might feel, are weaponised. Keep hands away from face; keep hands away from other hands.

I'm trying to watch dance but it's too alien right now, too far from my solitary reality. I hope for a single moment, a night-to-day transition where to hold and be held is safe again. I wait for the end of zero contact everything.

Irina Glinski



Vienna, Austria

Between a soft and a hard place

Radical softness, a concept first imagined by artist Lora Mathis, is a response to patriarchy's discomfort with anything overly sensitive and vulnerable, anything emotional, anything associated with care, femininity and idleness.

In the last year, I've been researching how to translate radical softness into a performance practice and a form of resistance: welcoming poetry in my writing, collecting pastel and fluffy things, crying to Adele's songs, but also inventing 'tender somatics', embracing the body as place to practice affect and penetrability. I've softened movement patterns stored in my body from years of rigorous dance training, learnt that staring at the ceiling is an integral part of the creative process, moved from a place of pleasure as opposed to duty, wondered what 'clitoris driven' choreography would look like.

And then the whole world entered a drastically 'hard phase', bringing up a swarm of questions. How to remain soft in catastrophic times? How to stay radical? How to lean into the discomfort (and elation) of witnessing seemingly rigid structures disintegrate before our eyes? How to protect the most vulnerable, those who are not seen as valuable, fit and healthy contributors to the economy? How to make space for all the feelings of grief, rage, impatience and hope which we normally ignore while we're hard at work?

Claire Lefèvre


Sofia, Bulgaria

Negative freedoms, basic guarantees

The current crisis makes visible that the 'free' in freelancing is a negative freedom, as in abandonment. Freelancing is detrimental to mental and physical health and leads to stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, sadness and a constant doubt in one's own personal and professional choices and capacities.

The privatisation of the problem – trying to solve it on an individual level by becoming even more flexible and adaptive to a broken economic model – will not solve the structural and social aspects of it.

A Hong Kong graffiti that went viral says: 'We can't return to normal, because the normal that we had was precisely the problem.'

A new economic model with guaranteed basic income and social security for all is not a utopia. Artists should be the first to ask for it, otherwise they'll become even more impoverished, precarious and indebted.

Yasen Vasilev


London, England

Disconnect / reconnect

Working in dance, in whatever capacity, very often makes you acutely aware that what we are doing is not exactly relevant for the functioning of society. Yes of course, we all believe the arts are important. 'Vital' even – a word that always looks so powerful on paper, when filling out funding applications or lobbying or fundraising. But when times get really tough, we cannot seriously argue that we are saving lives or feeding people or keeping the country ticking.

And yet. I haven't danced, seriously, for five years. I did the odd class here and there until that, too, dwindled away to an hour at the gym. But when everyone frantically stormed the internet to stream entertainment to us locked-up loners, I got up from my improvised #workfromhome desk, put my tattered old shoes on and joined an online ballet class. And I came home.

Praising the power of dance can feel so clichéd, so overused when it's your job to convince people of its value. But the personal physical experience that anytime, anywhere you can place your hand on a barre/windowsill/chair/kitchen counter and be completely at home, inside yourself yet connected to a certain tribe of people across the globe who are all in on the same secret – there really is a power to dance. It may have taken a pandemic to reconnect with it, but I never want to lose it again.

Suzanne Frost



Amsterdam, Netherlands

There is only one rock

While on reading-break, scrolling through Facebook, this post stood out: 'Corona-trend: the sudden, exaggerated urge to read Albert Camus.' Ha! I went back to my book: *The Myth of Sisyphus* by the man himself .

Camus' Sisyphus smiles. He has accepted 'the heartbreaking sense of an elusive world and a useless fate' and nonetheless keeps rolling the rock up the mountain. Not out of faith in a better tomorrow, but as a confirmation of life. In relation to dance, this angle on absurdity appeals to me, because – essentially absurd and purposeless as it is – dance entails an equally rebellious act of celebration.

Choreographer Miquel Barcelona recently wrote: 'A vulnerable body shakes. I've always been fascinated by this repetitive, imperfect, fragile movement that somehow shows us the possibility to cross a boundary through a crack.' In the appreciation of beauty within our (bodily) vulnerability, he says, lies a positive way out of this crisis. I agree. That's why I find solace in Camus.

This is neither easy nor evident. As a physically disabled woman, choreographer Chiara Bersani hears daily how her possible death is broadcasted – 'Coronavirus is mainly dangerous for the *weak*' – as a hopeful thought for the many. Her words against this narrative are urgent: 'We could have sailed together but remain anchored to our own rock instead. Immediate consolation is being preferred over collective reflection.'

There is only one rock.

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen



Berlin, Germany

Cereal Zoom

Face after face after face, stacked on top of each other. Like animated profile pictures pinned to a wall made of windows. Columns of noses and rows of eyes that focus on an unknown view. You don't know who to concentrate on, so you just end up gazing at yourself. IRL you might form a circle with your conversation partners, or sit in an asymmetrical kind of clump. You might direct your attention towards someone's ear or rest your gaze momentarily on someone's knees.

But all the possible angles of the body are easily forgotten when you're floating flatly in this shifting face-grid. You're in a digital theatre now, with a front-facing, conveyor-belt audience. You set the stage for your performance, streamed live from your bedroom - you turn off the news, turn on your desk lamp, hide the cereal and, in your default pyjama bottoms, return to mute.

Beatrix Joyce


Thessaloniki, Greece

Shared physical space

Being a dance teacher, I used to spend most of my time in a lively, large studio, meeting dozens of people every day. Used to undertaking multiple roles and juggling multiple tasks simultaneously, as most dancers do, *time* (or its lack) was a big issue. This was *before*. Now, in the quiet and confined space of my home, time is abundant, and day by day I come to acknowledge the value of *shared physical space*.

Social distancing shifts dancers from sharing spaces to solo training at home. The only space to be shared is online – a virtual space. Dancers are especially inclined to physical contact, as touching and being touched is part of our practice, an attribute that digital contact has yet to substitute.

Physical proximity is crucial for the art form, and I wonder how this shift will affect all our bodies, as dancers or non-dancers: not only the distancing from other bodies but also the distancing from large spaces to move in *together*, whether it is dance studios or the open air.

Stella Mastorosteriou


Berlin, Germany

Balcony scene

Today, confined to practising exercises on my balcony, I remembered how excited I was as a kid in the local ballet school by the belief that I could dance whatever, wherever and whenever. As long as I could reenact them well enough, I could steal the moves from the best, almost embodying their freedom and careless perfection. I was not alone in this. Dance desires alliance. Performance requires spectatorship.

Thinking about that now, I believe it to be more than a childhood dream of limitlessness. Dance is the art for a crisis. Potentially, it embodies solidarity and enables communication beyond language and cultural differences. Its economy is highly recyclable – hence endowed with a huge copyright problem – and its production allows thinking outside the input-profit-surplus logic. Repeat, re-enact, remix. For free.

Today you can dance alone at home, on your balcony, in front of the camera; in some tomorrow, in a park again, or a club, in the crowd, in the sun. This week I was supposed to see De Keersmaeker's *Rain* at the theatre. Instead, I will dance her *Rosas danst Rosas* in the asylum of my home, thanks to an online tutorial that – as it happens – she originally made in response to a copyright issue.

Someone else will dance it too, somewhere else, wherever, whenever. Is it enough? It is something.

Teresa Fazan



Edinburgh, Scotland

Never-ending story

Before the virus transformed life as we know it, I met a performance artist to talk about his upcoming show. I gave him some general advice about getting his work written about: press works through stories, I said, through events. Things that have a place and time that journalists and readers can tune into, attend, and feel part of. Stories are time bound: their trajectory is forward and we all rush to try to fit into them, throwing in our worth where we can, in anticipation of some future resolution.

What now? There are no stories, there is only one story. All actions are recast under this new light. We see how our identities were shaped by where we worked, the spaces we frequented, the relationships we valued – and we wonder if that is enough.

Is life still going forward? I suppose it is, I suppose we are all hoping it is. We wake up and check the news, we look forward to when this is 'all over'. The press continue to publish daily, finding new ways to talk about culture, food, sport.

Amongst all of this, some are asking for stillness. It seems an impossible task.

Róisín O'Brien



Barcelona, Spain

Move, don't move

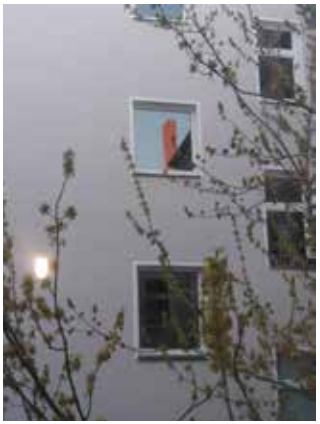
An unexpected change to the score of our daily choreography: *stay inside, don't move!* The response from all communication channels: *keep active, don't stop!*

So what am I supposed to do? Tried writing. Too challenging for concentration. Changed to reading. Good only for a short period. Not really into screens and windows bringing endless content into my home. The contradictory demands – *move, don't move* – leave my body restless.

After a week, the inertia of daily mundanities begins to slow down, the abundantly flowing kinetic energy ceases. Maybe we are (re)active more by habit than by will. External demands start to vanish and the superfluous gives space to the centre. I focus on the inner small dance, a merely visible vibration that springs out. A meditative choreography replaces the automatic, productive routine.

Somehow the pan(dem)ic starts to make sense. Maybe a more moderate route – less achievement, more awareness – is what we need to embody.

Riikka Laakso


Berlin, Germany

The past haunts the future

Performing arts are on standby. You know the drill. Here is your window, your Zoom, your mirror, take it. But online streaming becomes boring after a couple of hours, and I hate mirrors. With the present now absent, I choose to rely on my shaky memory. No longer a critic or writer, I become a spectator of remembrance.

First I recall that Ula Sickle show in Brussels, my birthday, high fever and headache. I now only remember red strobes kicking a huge flag through thick fog, the silky fabric shimmering brown and dark-red – like a hallucination of my blurred brain. And, oh, I once had that short theatre nap just to wake up to the stunning finale of Mathilde Monnier's *Twin Paradox*. Many years ago, me in a taxi from Orly airport hoping to see De Keersmaeker's *Golden Hours*, battling to get a spare ticket, front row. Summer sweat and two hours of sheer thrill, tears in the end. How can I forget it? I cannot.

The past is always here, and what haunts us now – memories of something beautiful, something grim or blue, enchanting or irritating – shapes our dreams for the future: restless, haunted and magnificent.

Evgeny Borisenko


Brussels, Belgium

Necessary optimism

Thinking about the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic is compulsive; reading and watching stuff online, an anxiety-inducing addiction. Social media amplifies every horror-story and incident – 'spitting is the new stabbing', 'grandmother left to die alone' – while cute stories of clapping on balconies and dance companies *à la maison* become the light relief that keeps us scrolling. The relentless online prattle is a virus in its own right, to which I am slowly developing a resistance.

Yet behind the screens, is the crisis a cover for 'shock doctrine' tactics? During the lockdown here in Belgium, one internet provider launched a version of the controversial and much protested G5, while the Flemish Minister of Culture – who had already slashed 60% of project funding – published a new text which could spell disaster for dance.

A student dancer, my 21-year-old son unequivocally embodies the choice of necessary optimism. He broke his spine just before the coronavirus crisis, yet he and fellow students are already creating work online. His generation of dancemakers seems unstoppable, and clearly has the wherewithal to screenshare when studio sharing is impossible. Moreover, as any injured dancer will tell you: you recover, but you are never the same again – you are more intelligent. I choose to believe this for all of us.

Oonagh Duckworth

ARTICLES



Caught in the act of seeing

Anastasio Koukoutas
25 June 2019

Look, then look again. On altering visions within three dance pieces from Greece

Athens, Greece

John Berger, the art critic who renewed our 'ways of seeing', once remarked, 'Like God, the viewer is unseen.' If performing arts and dance evolved around our gaze, and its power to behold and to objectify, what happens when that gaze is questioned? After all, dance broke the proscenium arch long ago, bringing performers and audience closer, questioning our ways of seeing, and suggesting a total sensory immersion or even audience participation in the staged action. As we are introduced to a plurality of visions on stage, we need once again to reconfigure the position of the one who sees. Is that still God-like?

Here's an example: picture – yes, again, image prevails – five dancers with vividly coloured costumes, performing, in slow motion, a sequence of movements on a bright pink carpet. The audience is seated around the periphery. Those familiar with **Maria Hassabi**'s work may have already got the picture: the sculptural presence of the bodies, the unfamiliar sense of being physically close to a staged performance, yet faintly detached. In *Staged*, Hassabi and her performers are more than physically engaged with the slow rhythm of the movement: their unnatural pace suggests an altered state of consciousness, inviting us also to alter our perception of the performed movement. We tend to 'see' movement as an infinity of variations in time and space, abrupt changes of rhythm, drastic shifts between areas of focus. However, in Hassabi's work, the notion of time is so expanded and the space so limited – the dancers barely shift on stage, their bodies surrender to gravity, creating a palpable density in the choreographed action – that we ask ourselves: what is there to see?

Staged is not about the illusion of stillness or a whimsical trick of slow-motion dance. If our gaze is trained to grasp things moving or altering relations in space, it is also trained to frame perceived action in slices of duration. Here, duration is so extended that it not only blurs the traces of movement but challenges the very notion of movement as inner compulsion and externalisation of the self. Failing to distinguish between moving and expressing movement, we are left questioning the central tenet of our perception: what do these bodies generate in time?

If movement is not evidence of the self trying to articulate something in a given duration, what are we invited to see? *Staged* makes evident that seeing is not entirely composed of (what remains) visible: by prioritising duration over space, our gaze is invited to withdraw and allow us to really 'attend' the show, to immerse in a time continuum. You can explore what's at stake yourself: try to make an ordinary movement, which would only take a second to complete, last a couple of minutes. Your attention is heightened, processing the details and nuances of the action, but the bodily sensations caused

by this slow-motion task are inscribed in time rather than projected as 'visible marks' in space. Your body is no longer about representing yourself. Movement is liberated from expression.

This separation of cause (the self) and effect (movement) is also approached rigorously in **Lenio Kaklea**'s *A Hand's Turn*, a solo for two spectators at a time. In a room which balances the sterile environment of a laboratory and the casual privacy of an artist's studio, the choreographer/performer sits behind a desk, facing her audience, ready to start acquainting herself with us through a series of questions: 'Do you remember that scene from the movie?', 'Do you recall this or that?' and so on. What is being examined is not our answers but we, as individuals, who give those answers, who converse daily, exchanging data. It is daunting to realise that this data forms cultural patterns that can verify or deny social convention.

Kaklea focuses on two body parts, each with its own distinct value: hands for practicality, and the face as the fortress of one's identity. Hands have also been imbued with moral values historically, the right hand prioritised and the left hand denigrated. Following Kaklea's hands as they turn the pages from two stacks of paper placed on the desk, our gaze is gradually fixed on their mechanical, rhythmic movement while fleetly scanning the contents of each page. These are strictly divided between left and right: phrases like 'I shake hands with the right' and 'Vote with the right' are printed on pages on our right, while 'They say left foot first would bring bad luck' or



Lenio Kaklea, *A Hand's Turn*
Photo © Arya Dil

'In Goya's painting his head leans on the left' are on pages on our left. Kaklea deliberately overstates this right/left orientation to strengthen the action that follows.

As she stands up and starts dancing, we are reminded that the body is also frequently a field of dichotomies. Kaklea accentuates this approach with her sexy clothing and striptease-like movements. She dances with her back to us, and a small hand mirror on a tripod allows us sporadically to see our own reflection. While her body is dancing to our right, our gaze is firmly on the mirror, in the image that looks back from our left. However, when she takes the mirror in her hands the game becomes even more complex: sometimes it's us who look through the mirror and sometimes it's her own image. The paradox is that her body remains detached from her face,

> **Your body is no longer about representing yourself**

making the body an interlocutor in this weird transaction. That her body is offered as feminised and objectified, with her/our face visible only from certain angles, reverses the rules of the vanishing point, of the vantage to see without being looked at, or even the 'worst' case scenario: to be looked at without knowing that you are seen.

By dichotomising face and body, the performer is dislocating desire, making this disjunction literal. With her workmanlike impassivity – so ably mastered by professional striptease artists – Kaklea offers her body but also confirms that the human face 'does not know nudity, because it is always naked' (Giorgio Agamben). Kaklea brings us face to face with an ethical question: by exercising our freedom to choose between her face and her body, we soon realise that our freedom is a guilty one, for it disregards the priority of the face, which in some cases may include our own image. By reversing our desire to behold, the performer obliges us to see mainly what she allows: her gaze towards us.



What is there to see? Maria Hassabi's Staged
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos for Onassis Stegi

Kiriakos Hadjioannou's *Erotikon* invites us to immerse ourselves in the idea of cruising, to be guided by our senses and not primarily by our gaze. As we enter the space, dimly lit and filled with smoke, a cube centre-stage pulsates in red. Inside it, four performers converse and exchange opinions on dating, fast loving, offering yourself as a sex buddy and the rare, yet real, feeling of eros. The audience surrounds this atypical dark room and peers through the blinds. This reaction has a consequence: as we sneak peeks through the slats we are caught in the act of seeing by other audience members. In meeting that gaze, we recognise ourselves looking, realising we are both exposed as bodies and as gazes. At some point the blinds open, two performers exit and blindfold each other. They move around us, almost touching us, heightening our responsibility to see for those who are blindfolded.

In *Erotikon*, seeing is a game of refractions, either through the blinds or through the gaze of another. The very performative nature of seeing becomes visible. The audience soon realises that there's no vanishing point to which they might escape, and if 'the trap of the visual field is that it promises to show all' – as Peggy Phelan once stated – then this field includes us all. Our points of view are exposed as



Kiriakos Hadjioannou: *Erotikon*
Photo © Elina Giounanli for Onassis Stegi

The audience realises that there's no vanishing point to which they might escape

the performers go in and out of the cube, shaping it with their actions, making it an orifice of desire while inviting us to look closer. An intimate act of entanglement between two male bodies, a dinner for two which ends with the Cartesian observations of the passions of the soul, a threesome of trembling bodies, all actions taking place within the vanishing walls of the cube – as the cube slowly folds – remind us that we are part of the picture. Once outside the image, our point of view has been placed within it.

These works all propose a resistance against stereotypical ways of looking, of performing the gaze, reminding us at the same time of its cultural value and how it has been shaped in centuries of making art. Reversing this paradigm is not an easy task: more than an aesthetic choice, it also reveals the power of the looker, the 'natural' feeling of just seeing what is there to see. However, the stage is an apparatus through which identities are constructed, verified and performed. To see differently requires not only seeing 'outside the box', but also admitting our privilege of being in the position to see, to value and to understand. But since understanding remains an irresolvable situation between two parts, we ought to admit our (occasional) blindness to what is revealed through seeing. •



> The past can be used to question the present

Already there? On the politics of gesture

Emily May
18 July 2019

Italian choreographic duo Ginevra Panzetti and Enrico Ticconi talk about powerplay and physical rhetoric, past and present



In art, and in contemporary dance in particular, originality is often viewed as a criterion for quality. But for Italian dance duo Ginevra Panzetti and Enrico Ticconi, this is not the case. ‘For our first work together, we decided we wouldn’t create anything new,’ says Panzetti, referring to their 2008 piece *Area*. ‘We recorded people in squares, on the streets and in the metro, and we began to mimic their postures and their movements. We realised there was a massive amount of material already there, in front of us.’

Originally from Rome, Panzetti and Ticconi had first met at high school, both going on to study stage design at Rome’s Academy of Fine Arts before starting weekly dance classes. They began to explore working as a choreographic duo during their training at Claudia Castellucci’s Stòa School of Rhythmic Movement and Philosophy, where they created *Area*. They both moved to Germany in 2010 to pursue individual but complementary paths, Ticconi studying dance and choreography in Berlin, Panzetti media art in Leipzig. Though Panzetti has since moved back to Italy, they have developed a range of duets together, presenting their work at venues across Europe.

Ten years on from their first piece, they are still working with ‘what is already there’. But they have come a long way

Enrico Ticconi in *Harleking*
Photo © Dieter Hartwig



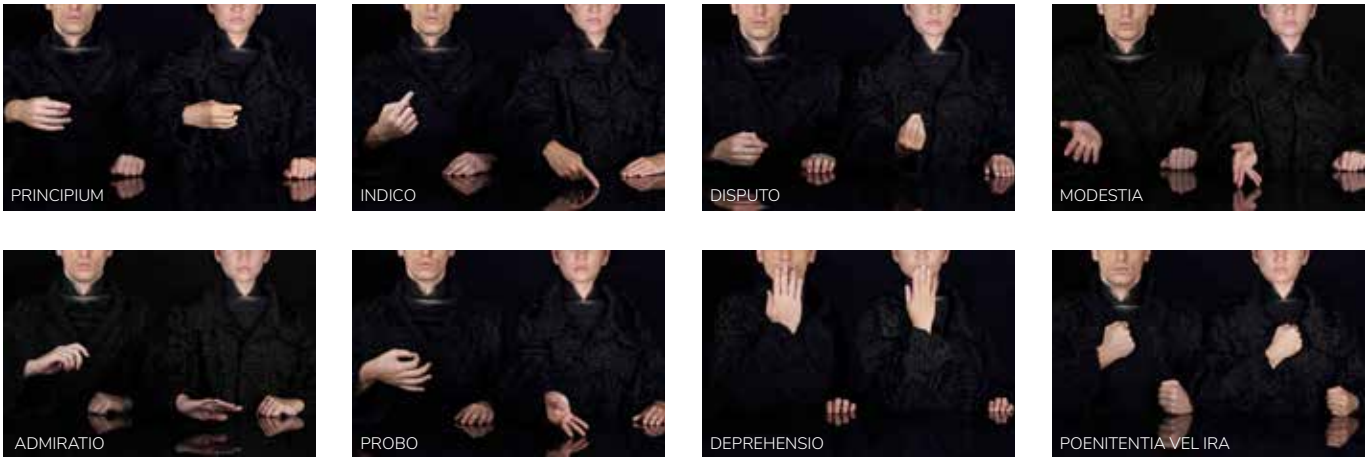
Ginevra Panzetti in *Harleking*
Photo © Dieter Hartwig

since turning to bus stops and subways for inspiration. Now they imbue many pieces with references to historical events, art movements and traditions. 'We have both been interested in art and history since our teenage years, so it has always been a key reference for us when it comes to creating,' says Ticconi.

'We also reference the past so that we can play with the audience's collective memory,' adds Panzetti. 'We are very interested in questioning the different identities that power can take, and how power can be developed through communication.' Their 2011 work *Lend Me Your Ears*, for example, explores the figure of the orator and how leaders have communicated to their subjects through history. Using Mark Antony's speech from Stuart Burge's 1970 film *Julius Caesar*, and Hynkel's Oration from Chaplin's 1940 *The Great Dictator* as points of departure, Ticconi and Panzetti execute a series of what they call rhetorical gestures: gesticulations used by speakers to help them get their point across, and win the public over.

They revisited this theme in their 2012 dance film *Actio*, which mimetically recreated hand gestures described in Quintilian's *Institute of Oratory*, an ancient Roman treatise on rhetoric. 'It does vary depending on the project, but in general the approach of mimesis is very useful for us,' says Ticconi. 'We use iconographic references and mimic the images, gestures and movements that they present, and then explore that material more freely.'

In their 2011 dance film *Die Wanderer*, for example, they adopt poses in landscapes



Images from the film *Actio* (2012) recreating gestures from Quintilian's treatise on rhetoric, *Institute of Oratory*

that had inspired various paintings of the Romantic era. In their 2012 durational performance *Cardine* they use ancient maps of the first Roman colony to explore themes of urbanisation. Their latest work, *Harleking*, premiered in 2018 in Berlin, makes reference to grotesques. Originating from ancient Rome and revived during the Renaissance, grotesque murals and sculptural decorations fuse together depictions of animals, plants, and human forms. 'They can often be very elegant and abstract,' Panzetti, 'but monstrous at the same time.'

Harleking sees the performers adopt the stylised *commedia dell'arte* persona of the Harlequin to make a point about how humour and acting like a 'fool' in politics can disguise more sinister motivations. For Panzetti, the Harlequin is 'on the surface, a funny figure. He makes you laugh' – yet he is also known for being a devilish, self-serving trickster. 'This quality of power in politicians is a familiar feature in our political history in Italy,' says Ticconi; and certainly, in *Harleking* they recreate the fascists' infamous 'Roman salute', later used by the Nazis.

'Using humour to disguise darker messages is very prevalent in politics nowadays,' says Panzetti. Indeed, seeing such clear, evocative, and controversial symbols from history paired onstage with humorous moments where the performers giggle and trick each other, one can't help but think of contemporary politicians, presidents and prime ministers who have initially been branded as fools only to become threats to democracy as we know it. Panzetti and Ticconi may be playing with our collective cultural memory, but they also shine a light on our present. 'Evoking the figure of a twentieth-century dictator on stage can open our imaginations to the past,' comments Panzetti, 'but it can also be used to question the present, and invite people to ask themselves: how can this be read in relation to contemporary society?' •

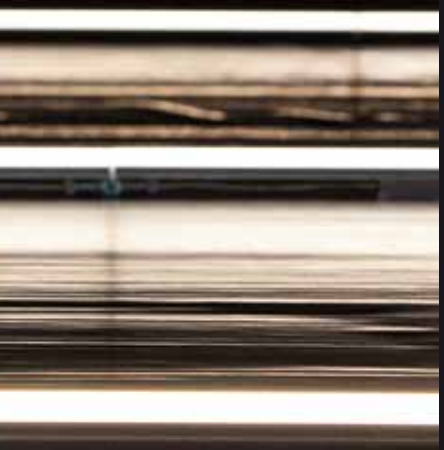


Hack me tender
Mette Ingvartsen's Red Pieces

Anna Kozonina
09 August 2019

Orgies, utopias and joyful existence in Mette Ingvartsen's Red Pieces

ImPulsTanz Vienna, Austria



Mette Ingvartsen in *21 Pornographies*
Photo © Jens Sethzman

Sunday evening, 21 July 2019 – the densely packed hall of the Akademie Theater in Vienna burst into an applause that did not subside for almost ten minutes. Twelve half-naked dancers of Mette Ingvartsen's *7 pleasures* were coming back for a bow again and again, having performed an *a capella* vocalisation of a collective orgasm. This intriguing musical number turned out to be the last 'pleasure' of the 100-minute piece by the Danish choreographer, who is famous, among other things, for a series of works on desire and sexuality called The Red Pieces. Usually featured separately, this year the whole series was presented by the ImPulsTanz international dance festival. Evidently these shows, however weird and disturbing, hit right into the heart of the international audience – and perhaps even got into their pants.

Organising orgies

The Red Pieces currently comprise four works. *69 positions* (2014) and *21 pornographies* (2017) are solos by Ingvartsen herself, while *7 pleasures* (2015) and *to come (extended)* (2017) are collective performances for twelve and fifteen dancers respectively. In various ways, the pieces question well-established images of sexual practices, explore how desire and sexual energy are appropriated by capitalism, investigate the affinity between the public and the intimate, and try to invent new modes of erotic relationship.

One of the most powerful images in the pieces is the orgy, which appears most prominently in *7 pleasures* and *to come (extended)*. In both works it serves to question patriarchal and couple-based sexual practices, but the critique unfolds in different ways. In the first part of *to come*, an orgy is a means to depersonalise and de-identify the dancers, as they perform pornographic scenes in tight blue suits that hide age, gender and national differences. Penetration, a symbol of male power and supremacy, is replaced here by mutual frottage. The imagery, thus, stays sex-positive, but loses its binding to aggression against women, which has historically been in the heart of mainstream pornography.

7 pleasures consists of seven scenes where a group of people embody non-standard ways of reaching a collective ecstasy. It starts with a huddle of naked bodies in the far corner of the stage, which then gradually transforms and moves forward through the scenery, looking like a huge lump of soft dough. In the following scenes, a table, an armchair, a carpet, fancy lamps, as well as meditation balls and quirky straps become equal participants of the human orgy. The borders between the bodies, as well as between the bodies and the objects, completely disappear. A woman, putting a houseplant between her legs, starts to lick its leaves, as if the plant asked for it. Another performer is wrapped in a carpet, so that it seems to grab and devour her on its own… The objects in *7 pleasures*, whether sex toys or interior furnishings, seem to acquire a will of their own and the ability to desire.

Archives and utopias

Even a cursory glance at these three scenes reveals Ingvartsen's focus on sexuality in relation to social and political issues. This is even clearer in 69 *positions* which, unlike the other Red Pieces, is not a stage show but a guided tour. Ingvartsen invites visitors into the exhibition space showing documentation of 1960s performances such as Carolee Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964), *Dionysus in 69* by The Performance Group, and Yayoi Kusama's manifesto 'Stock is a fraud!', which served as a press release for *Naked Demonstration* at Wall Street back in 1968.

During those years, the naked body was a means and symbol of protest against wars and expanding capitalism. As usually happens in times of social upheaval, this was a period of rethinking the limits between the public and the private. Free bodily and sexual expression, taken from the repository of the intimate sphere, was supposed to be one of the routes to a new social order. In 69 *positions* and in the later Red Pieces, Ingvartsen works with the artistic archive of the 1960s to observe how everything has changed through the years of neoliberal turn in politics and culture. She reflects on how eroticism and seduction have been captured by marketing strategies to impose excessive consumption, how aggressive pornography established itself instead of new joyful social order. This critique partly appears in *7 pleasures*, where capitalistic eroticising of objects is taken to the limit, so that objects themselves seem to start having desires. You can see it too in the last part of 69 *positions*, when Ingvartsen licks the lightbulb and the table, and intensively rolls a meditation ball along her spine.

Having observed the histories of the 1960s and 2000s, Ingvartsen insists that today the naked body is a costume, not a manifesto; yet it remains the battlefield for and against traditional sexual identities. For decades, this battle has been taking place under our skin, on the level of pharmacology, affects and desires. That's why, in the third part of the guided tour, she reads extracts from *Testo Junkie*, a book by transgender activist, philosopher and biohacker Paul B. Preciado. That's why 69 *positions* ends with imaginary erotic practices, with special devices which stimulate and sex up bodies in order to 'hack' our common notions of pleasure. Freedom today has nothing to do with 'free' bodily expression, says Ingvartsen in an interview with Tom Engels, but it has to be continuously constructed – through collective or individual subversive practices.

Joyful resistance and dark imagination

Though Ingvartsen seems to be a good cultural theorist, her works stand away from 'conceptual' dance pieces. Instead of presenting dull choreographic concepts, she prefers capturing our attention with powerful images and vigorous music. Thus, she borrows pop-culture emotional strategies, which have usually been more engaging and seductive than the methods of theatre. This is very clear in the last scene of *to come*, where naked performers spin in crazy Lindy Hop dancing, exchanging partners, leaders and gender roles.

> **Eroticism and seduction have been captured by marketing**

Familiar tunes and infectious movements energise the audience and, together with Ingvartsen's critique, create what she calls 'joyful resistance'.

Another Red Pieces battleground is, of course, imagination, which is so crucial for marketing, politics, erotica and theatre. It is the very sphere where we can conceive utopias, train our sensitivity, succumb to temptations and nurture desires. Exercises with imagination arise, more or less explicitly, throughout all the series – but most of all in *21 pornographies*, the darkest of Ingvartsen's cycle.

21 pornographies takes place mostly in the spectators' minds, and begins with a voiceover recounting a story set in an old mansion. While nothing is happening visually, the audience's attention is being absorbed by a narration, in which seductive scenes intertwine with those of violence. In a few minutes, Ingvartsen comes on stage and stays there as a narrator and a performer. She tells the stories, sometimes portraying their fragments – always appealing to the viewers' ability to imagine.

Thus, in the first part, she tells of a young girl in a white dress – a symbol of innocence – who is enforced to satisfy the desire of a pervert and eat his shit. At that moment Ingvartsen addresses the viewers and asks them to try a chocolate sweet, hidden under their chairs. Later, we have to imagine an erotic video shooting, in which chocolate is poured over the actress until she faints. The imaginary film director then works on a military movie, trying to make it more and more brutal. Although spectators can see almost nothing, Ingvartsen's performance



Collective, not coupled ecstasy.
Mette Ingvartsen's *7 Pleasures*.
Photo © Marc Coudrais



More guided tour than stage performance: Mette Ingvartsen in 69 *Positions*.
Photo © Fernanda Tafner

is shocking – mostly because of how delicately she fuses seduction and violence. In *21 pornographies* there is no morality and no clear ethical statement – you can be shocked by the dark side of pleasure, and enjoy it as well. And that's what makes this piece intimidating, disgusting and, at the same time, enticing and extremely powerful.

For the first time throughout The Red Pieces, we see clearly the value of Ingvartsen's orgies and joyful existence. We explore the dark side of pornographic pleasure, which, after all the old feminist debates of the 1970s, is still mostly about consumerism and violence. We see how common sexual imagery is related to the history of media, and this history, in turn, to the needs of war. In the end, we see that our imagination, usually captured by the politics of consumption, is a battlefield, where alternative ways of living can appear.

Sounds too much like what was buried in the 1960s? But it doesn't seem that Ingvartsen wants to wake the dead: she wants theatre to remain a place where we can together work on the political imagination. •

Postdancing in the dark

Anna Kozonina
13 November 2019

Posting from the POST-DANCE-ING conference in Stockholm 2019, Anna Kozonina asks: how did it work, and what did it do?

MDT Theatre, Stockholm, Sweden

'A dance studio is not just a dance studio any more – it's a hybrid space,' says choreographer and curator Karina Sarkissova during a panel discussion at MDT theatre in Stockholm. This is the second day of the POST-DANCE-ING conference, and my impression is that we are in a mess; but this remark suddenly grabs my attention and puts everything in its place. A studio is not just an area demarcated by the walls and the floor, but also a laptop screen connecting the dancer with the images, affects and informational noises of the 'outside world'.

For the last fifty years, this world has been changing dramatically: from industrial production with guaranteed jobs to mostly intellectual, 'creative' freelance labour; from colonial dominance of European countries to a postcolonial state of affairs and fierce migration; from mostly patriarchal rule to the new feminist uprisings; from beliefs in eternal progress to awareness of ecological catastrophe. It's always changing in terms of technologies and media, which in many ways have influenced politics, social relations and the balance between private and public life.

Our habitual ways of living are not valid any more – and neither are our accustomed ways of dancing. How can we face those challenges as dance practitioners?



It seems that such questions could describe the vague intentions of the POST-DANCE-ING conference, held at MDT from 23 to 25 October 2019, which gathered together more than 150 professionals: dancers, choreographers, curators, managers and theoreticians. Although the term 'conference' often refers to scientific discourse, this gathering was in no way academic. Instead, this meeting proved to be more like a choreographic piece than a consistent set of reports – and this is directly related both to the 'postdance' concept and the complicated set of circumstances which it tries to explore and illuminate.

What was it about? Huh, that's a difficult question. We'd rather ask *how it was functioning* and *what it did do for* the attending people. But before we go into details, it's worth saying a few words about its origin and background.

A container, not a concept

The term ‘postdance’ appeared in 2015 as the name of another conference at MDT, curated by Danjel Andersson (who back then headed the theatre), along with Cullberg ballet artistic director Gabriel Smeets and theoretician André Lepecki. No one could say exactly what postdance actually was – and such exposed uncertainty was indeed the very idea of the curators. According to Andersson, ‘postdance’ is a container, not a concept, which probably means that this term tries to grope towards and map out current situations in dance rather than define it in settled terms.

The word ‘postdance’ was vague, but nevertheless exposed several issues which were and still are relevant for experimental dance, at least in Western countries. In the book of the same name, published by MDT two years later, there were texts dealing with queer and feminist strategies in dance, precarious freelance labour, the affective turn in arts and culture, dance in the era of post-internet art, imagination and knowledge production, the aims of choreography, somatics and the issues of power. In such a context, dance found itself sensitive to changes and shifts in today’s politics, aesthetics and social life, but also specific in its relation to bodies, imagination and affects.

Though defining the term was not the main objective of the book, a few authors reflected on what ‘post’ might mean in relation to dance. In ‘Notes on Post-dance’, philosopher Josefine Wikström said that ‘post’ could literally mean ‘after’ – in this case indicating a new period in Western dance coming after so-called ‘conceptual’ dance or ‘non-dance’.

Though those terms are also debatable, they identify a powerful tendency in the



Photo © Anna Kozonina

1990s and 2000s, which had started with works by Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy and others, and was characterised by the primacy of choreography over dance, and criticism of traditional theatre representation. In that sense, postdance could be the next step in this history – which would, ironically, mean an affirmation of dance. A similar thought could be found in Mårten Spångberg's essay 'Postdance, an Advocacy', which insisted on bringing senses, affects and dancing itself back into the field of dance. Another idea was to consider 'post' as an indicator of a state whereby dance reflected on its own conditions – and so could be applied both to experiments since the 1960s and 70s and to self-critical dance of our own days.

Since the 'container' was open to new interpretations, the term then appeared in various contexts in different countries, for example, in Denmark, Portugal and Russia. But it remained obscure, and perhaps therefore not that popular.

This year the curatorial team proved to be more gender-balanced: Andresson and Smeets organised the new meeting together with Zoë Poluch (DOCH School of Dance and Circus), Tove Dahlblom (Danscentrum) and Sara Bergsmark (MDT). The conference was then called POST-DANCE-ING, thus with the same 'container' in the core, but with the focus on process and practice. Of course, the 'ing' also served as another 'container', which might refer to practice, duration, presence, continuity, all that together – or something else altogether.

Enjoy the missing out

Again, nobody insisted on defining these terms, but the conference programme did outline some specific topics: micro-actions to fight social exclusion (a workshop by Rebecca Vinthagen); post-truth and questions of ownership (a report by Turkish artist Erdem Gündüz also known as 'standing man'); dance in relation to words and discourse (a stand-up performance by American choreographer Reggie Wilson); a report on hope (by London-based dance-maker Malik Nashad Sharpe); and finally, love and death (a lecture-performance by MDT resident Halla Ólafsdóttir).

These 'starters' were followed by prepared responses from conversation partners, and these in-depth conversations were in turn taken further by two or three people appointed each time to discuss the topic. The discussion would then continue for all interested attendees in the studios in the basement – at the same moment that a new lecture started. So participants were constantly feeling they couldn't attend all the conversations.

Curiously, that feeling of 'missing out', the constant cognitive ups and downs – even, I would say, a sense of failure – proved to be not only structural but also the real content of the meeting. We were rather improvising within a predetermined score: always snatching ideas from the space, trying to be sensitive to emotional shifts, feeling confused and, evidently, always missing out on something.

The first day actually started with the idea of failure and absence: the organisers

> **The feeling of 'missing out' – even a sense of failure – proved to be the real content of the meeting**



admitted they had failed to arrange the first performance as intended. Because of many cancellations during the preparation period, they decided to invite Ingrid Mugalu and Lydia Östberg Diakité, two women of colour, to share their artistic practice – but did so at short notice and offered less preparation time than they had to everybody else. In response, Mugalu and Diakité accused the curators of structural racism in a very detailed and emotional letter. Instead of giving a presentation, Mugalu publicly read the letter to the curatorial team saying they were fed up with being treated as people always ready to fill the diversity quota and keep the skin colour balance at public events.

However, this 'failed presentation' provoked more discussion and emotion than we could probably expect if it had succeeded. Though it was the only specific case, I could feel this tendency throughout the conference: instead of trying to 'fill the gaps' (saying something smart in a discussion, being politically correct or ostentatiously cute) people were welcoming vagueness, confusion and failure.

Dissatisfaction with words and traditional knowledge production, with its recurring theoretical clichés and politically correct mantras, was another theme manifested both in the content and the structure. 'I hate words,' said Reggie Wilson in his stand-up lecture, indicating that texts in our society have more power than dance and bodily knowledge, which is beyond words. 'Understanding is a conservative concept in terms of art,' echoed his conversation partner Jeanine Durning in her lecture-performance, which in 15 minutes made me stop looking for 'information' and concentrate on movement, atmosphere and space.

> **Understanding is a conservative concept in terms of art**

The only conventionally well-structured report, by researcher Konstantina Georgelou, was dedicated to choreomania and the chaotic power of collective dance on the streets. But in the frame of the conference this academic paper was read slowly, as if it were a fairy tale. The following discussions were all stitched with pauses, suspended remarks and uncertain questions...

Seven hours a day – well, it was enough to suppress the desire for clarity and make people accept the vagueness and uncertainty inhabiting the aforementioned 'container'.

No apologies for magic or tears

'It's all about you and us and all the love in-between again and again and again, over and over and over, it's never over (into infinity) 4everuntil DEATH'. That was the name of the last 'starter' (my favourite one), performed by Halla Ólafsdóttir. Ólafsdóttir is a dancer, but this was a quasi-rock concert rather than a lecture



Photo © Anna Kozonina

or a dance, an experiment in the production of affects and collectivity aided by loud music, imagination and showing off. This was perhaps the least academic 'report', dealing with the rock star image and its performativity, collective emotions and impossible combinations of masculinity and femininity, affection and sympathy, joy and love. But it also illuminated the whole conference's intention to find liminal or hybrid ways of thinking about dance. Someone in the audience described Ólafsdóttir's 'lecturing' as a 'disruptive monstrous presence' – and this could well describe the essence of the conference in general. 'I don't want to be here apologising for magic or tears,' claimed choreographer Eleanor Bauer during the final discussion, highlighting the importance of affectivity throughout this meeting.

Can we treat confusion and vagueness as positive concepts? Can we stay with undefined things and unpredictable relations between thoughts? These are perhaps the most important questions I would take with me from this conference, which otherwise rather pissed me off in terms of concepts and rationality. (Honestly, there were a few moments when I was afraid that the 'container' was ready to turn into a garbage bin.) But maybe it was just another step to defining the agendas of future dance conferences with more care and attention. 'Conference' might suggest academic presentation, but *conferre* means 'to come together' – and hopefully these two semantic layers will reach a balance in a further post-postdance conference. •

Can we treat confusion and vagueness as positive concepts?



Moving audiences
Montag Modus

Mirjam Sögner at Montag Modus
Photo © Barbara Antal



Beatrix Joyce
15 November 2019

Curator Léna Szirmay-Kalos on performance formats beyond the theatre

Berlin, Germany

Contemporary dance can be presented anywhere: from museums to former factories, from white-wall gallery spaces to graffiti-adorned street corners. Choreographers are also, as well as forging new stages, increasingly inviting audiences to immerse themselves in durational performative installations or take part in one-on-one encounters or interventions. Along with this variety of spaces and formats have come new methods of programming. At this nexus sits Berlin's Montag Modus, an event series that presents mixed, multimedia performances across multi-storey buildings.

Montag Modus was initiated in 2015 when the Hungarian cultural institute, Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, invited curator **Léna Szirmay-Kalos** to devise a performance event featuring Berlin-based and Hungarian artists. Four years and thirty-odd editions later, the curatorial team has expanded, led since 2019 by the independent collective **MMPraxis** (Szirmay-Kalos, choreographer Jasna Layes Vinovrški and Budapest-based art historian Dániel Kovács). The 2019 programme, titled 'Klimata', explores a broad range of perspectives on climate change with five events across two vastly different locations: the sleekly institutional cultural house of the Collegium Hungaricum Berlin, and the rough, concrete artists' studio complex Am Flutgraben.

Szirmay-Kalos spoke to Springback about working outside the theatre context, the term 'performance exhibition' and about plans to bring Montag Modus to Prague and London.

BJ: At Montag Modus you invite dance artists to show a work-in-progress or adapt an existing piece. How does this work?

LSz-K: Usually I approach artists whose work suits the theme of the event. We talk about the programme and the site and how their piece could fit within it – most artists find it an interesting challenge! They are then invited for a one-week mini-residency on site where they adapt their piece to the space. As we don't have the technical capacities of a fully equipped theatre, we are, rather than 'simplifying' the works, more interested in rethinking them in the frame of Montag Modus. This means that with a stage piece, artists might take a notion or a single scene from the work and expand on that. This is what the Hungarian trio **Ábris Gryllus**, **Márton Emil Tóth** and **Tamara Zsófia Vadas** did with their project 'NIBIRU': they used their research, which addressed the Anthropocene from the viewpoint of teenage girls, to create a performative installation. The starting point for this 'environment' was the same as it was for the original piece, but it became an entirely different work in the process. Other pieces already work well in the space and barely require adaptation or cutting, such as **Dragana Bulut**'s solo *Pass it on*, which we presented in its full-length version. Once we know the formats of the night, we, as curators, come up with a schedule and discuss this with the artists. Each event is essentially a co-creation of many.

Léna Szirmay-Kalos.
Photo © Barbara Antal



BJ: What do you pay attention to when you create the programme?

LSz-K: We aim to offer our audience different bodily invitations throughout the night. Rather than staying put, like in the traditional theatre experience, our audience is mobile, as they move between rooms and spaces to visit the performances that overlap or happen simultaneously as they occupy the whole building. Overall, the structure is loose – people are welcome to come in later or leave earlier, and as an audience member you are not necessarily obliged to watch the pieces. This creates a kind of dramaturgy, or multiple dramaturgies of the evening, as audiences get to choose their own route.

BJ: To what extent do you direct this 'route'?

LSz-K: It depends. We have had evenings where we had a tight schedule, and we had to move the audience swiftly from one space to another, which created



Melanie Jame Wolf's *Chorus* at Montag Modus
Photo © Barbara Antal

a real sense of collective experience. And then there are other events where the audience is hardly ever all gathered in the same room, leading to a more individual experience. Sometimes a piece might have limited spots, meaning that from the outset, it is not possible for everyone to see it. We are always interested in confronting our audience with the fact that they can never see everything – they have to make a choice and accept their decisions.

BJ: So what kind of role does the audience take?

LSz-K: Montag Modus has the energy of an exhibition opening or a première, but it demands a different kind of focus from the audience and the liberal structure results in many in-between moments – between performances, between spaces – where people can talk. It's a very social event! Also, the works themselves very often invite encounters or create relations among audience members, like in the case of environments or installations: when the audience enters, they become part of the piece.

In what way can inter-disciplinary projects be presented in locations created for disciplinary works?

And interesting relations emerge when people are made to move. For example, for the topic of the anthropocene, cultural scholar Martina Ruhsam wrote a text which we printed on a 20-metre roll of paper and installed on the staircase. It was very interesting how it activated the audience: to read the poem they had to go backwards down the stairs and try not to bump into one another. This intertwining of art and social life, overlapping on a high energy level, is a core part of Montag Modus.

BJ: Was the text commissioned for the event?

LSz-K: Yes. With this year's Klimata series, we were interested in inviting a writer or a cultural scholar to contribute to the topic for each event. Most of the texts became very poetic and we thought about how they could be 'performed' in line with the theme. For example the text 'Digital Eschatology', on the topic of digital climate by philosopher Márió Z. Nemes, was sent to the audience via email.

BJ: How would you define the format you are working in?

LSz-K: It's a work-in-progress term, but we use 'performance exhibition'. 'Performance' because we are programming live art, 'exhibition' because the audience has the freedom to move around, like they would in an art gallery. But using terms from the visual arts is not unproblematic: as with 'live art', they take on a different meaning. The same counts for the understanding of roles. With time-based works the role of the curator includes another layer of direction, namely what happens when. My decisions have an impact on the presentation of the works and therefore in some way on how they are perceived. I am often conflicted about this, and find myself asking in what way are my decisions acceptable in terms of authorship. In what way can an interdisciplinary project be presented in locations that are created for disciplinary works?

BJ: How do institutions respond to the 'performance exhibition' format?

LSz-K: Well, the main question here, is in what way can an interdisciplinary project be presented in locations that are created for disciplinary works? Take the museum: the layout, the air-conditioning, everything in the space is created to preserve art works. What happens when you place a body there? I'm interested in playing with these questions and finding institutions that have the possibilities, both on an infrastructural and on a spatial level, to allow these kind of experimentations to happen. There are some – like the Tate in London and the Walker centre in the States – that have a department for the visual arts and for the performing arts, and are researching how these disciplines can not just co-exist but enter into dialogue with one another. A lot depends on the context in which they are presented. Take Anne Imhof's works. She comes from a visual arts backgrounds and says she creates images, but from a dance perspective it is a site-specific piece. As it is presented in a visual arts context it is perceived through a different lens.

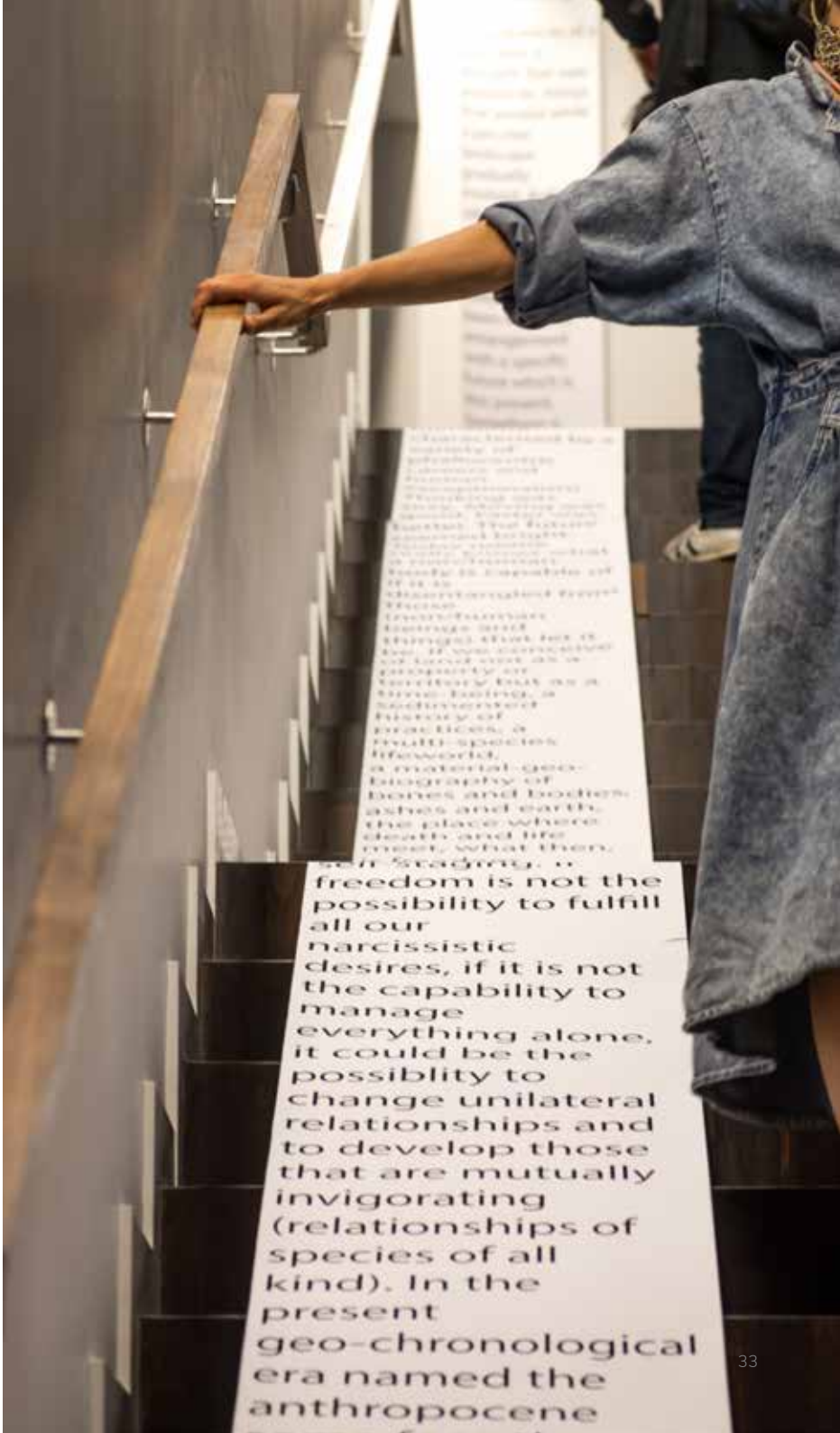
BJ: Are these disciplinary lenses also reflected in funding mechanisms?

LSz-K: Unfortunately the funding structure – and not just in Berlin – is very discipline-oriented. We are very lucky to be supported by the Berlin Senat and the Hauptstadtkulturfonds (which is also why our events are free!) with their *Spartenoffene* ('discipline-open') funding programme. But even then we were required to apply from a given discipline. Within the existing categories of visual arts and contemporary dance, I am interested in asking the question: what is theatricality in both of these worlds? I feel that many things are very similar but they exist in parallel to one another because of the divisions between the scenes. But rather than creating events for only one of these scenes, I am interested in finding ways that their audiences can overlap.

BJ: What do you have planned for the future?

LSz-K: Stemming from the format, the Fear of Missing Out is next year's topic. We will be looking into attention, commitment and distraction. Can distraction, especially from authority, be a form of emancipation? And as a way to invite new influences into the curation of Montag Modus, the curatorial team, featuring academics and artists, will be different for each event. It's important to consistently unlearn what I have learnt! In 2020, we will be heading to the gigantic space of Divadlo X10 in Prague in July, and there are also plans to come to London... •

Activating the audience: Martina Ruhsam's text on the anthropocene. Photo © Barbara Antal



PT19: On being, enduring and becoming the performing body

Riikka Laakso
29 November 2019

Controlling, uncovering and being the performer's body, at the 2019 Portuguese Platform for Performing Arts

Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal

This is an edited excerpt of a text originally written in Finnish for Liikekieli.com magazine

The 2019 Portuguese Platform for Performing Arts offered an insight into the vivid field of dance and theatre. The organiser O Espaço do Tempo, holder of an international artist residence programme, has during its 18 years of work offered inspiration for choreographers such as Jefta van Dinther and Marlene Monteiro Freitas. This year the platform, familiarly called PT19, was an intense mixture of 17 original works: from *Turning Backs* placing the audience in the centre of the action to Tânia Carvalho's intimate midnight concert, to Jonas and Lander's spectacle with a swimming pool and drones, or to meticulously elaborated research-based performances on dance and society.

Three performances lead my thoughts to the performer, to the hard-working and tireless body constantly offering itself to the audience.

In **Cristina Planas Leitão**'s *UM [unimal]*, the dancer Daniela Cruz enters the stage and, following the choreographer's instructions made audible by a microphone, takes off her clothes. She then puts on a uniform for the performance: a dark fashionable jumpsuit and black combat boots. From now on the choreographer connects with her through headphones; only they know what is said. The dancer starts an endless marching, following a beat that fills the space. By accentuating the tiny but visible transformations of the body, the marching movement slowly transforms from the hips into a sexy Beyoncé-style walking, or grows into a spatial shift that captures the small intentions of the head. The body's multiple tiny gestures become material for individuality, they are possibilities for change, while the almost obsessive marching machine mutilates all human details, creating a violent and desperate ambience. In our current time, considered with questions of abuse or limits in relation to performers, a dancer waiting for instructions from a faceless choreographer – placed in the darkness of the theatre balcony – inevitably suggests questions of power, hierarchy, authority and artistry. If the dystopic structure was supposed to be questioned by irony or by the resistance of the living body, unfortunately it didn't reach me.

A long-time actress and director, **Mónica Calle** has since 2015 been building the project *Rehearsal for a Cartography*, where (around) twelve performers keep gathering in front of an audience to rehearse certain tasks. Naked. Physical tasks, such as repeating a movement in strict formation to recordings of Ravel's *Bolero* (three in total, played in full each time). Or a musical task, where the performers, with little previous experience of playing an instrument, rehearse a fragment of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony with violins, cellos and double basses. The bodies discover these places of rehearsing – filled with not-knowing and imperfection – where discomfort is revealed through vibrating skin, fragile

and false notes, or faces expressing extreme concentration. Textures of vulnerability and humanity. This two-hour performance employs repetition and duration to remove masks and abandon control: to be able to reach the intimacy of a body – a site of the performer's privacy – struggling to succeed.

A third piece reflecting on the performer's role does that by actually removing the performers: the spectator has no bodies to look at, but becomes active in the work. *Turning Backs* – a proposal by **Lígia Soares**, **Rita Vilhena** and **Diogo Alvim** – seats the audience on two large benches, literally back-to-back. I'm leaning on a tall, bony male back, squeezed between two full-figured co-spectators. A sensation of excitement and odd safeness. Words start to appear on the screen in front of us, we read aloud, I enjoy the perfect British English of my partners, resonating in my body through the contact. A dialogue between the two benches, receiving a different input from the screens. Then playing with rhythms, loudness and whispering: we turn the textual score of the screens into sound, and decide how to interpret it. A pleasure in reading together, annoyance with quite repetitive dramaturgy, a hint of boredom or momentarily playfulness flows from body to body. Directly and with no censure. We are asked to get involved, but sometimes we just prefer to turn our backs: to decide not to perform. And face the challenge to be intimate with strangers, in silence, touching.

The small town of Montemor-o-Novo is ideal for continuous and unexpected encounters. The PT19 participants – programmers, artists, curators, writers – bump into each other before and after performances, over lunch, walking from venue to venue. This sharing between strangers, old and new collaborators or well-known colleagues becomes special in the Portuguese platform. 'The egos are left outside, and we step into a world more on the skin,' says Ángels Margarit, director of Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona. A sharing of impressions, reflections, deep conversations, PT19 radiated sensitivity, dedication and serenity on multiple levels. •

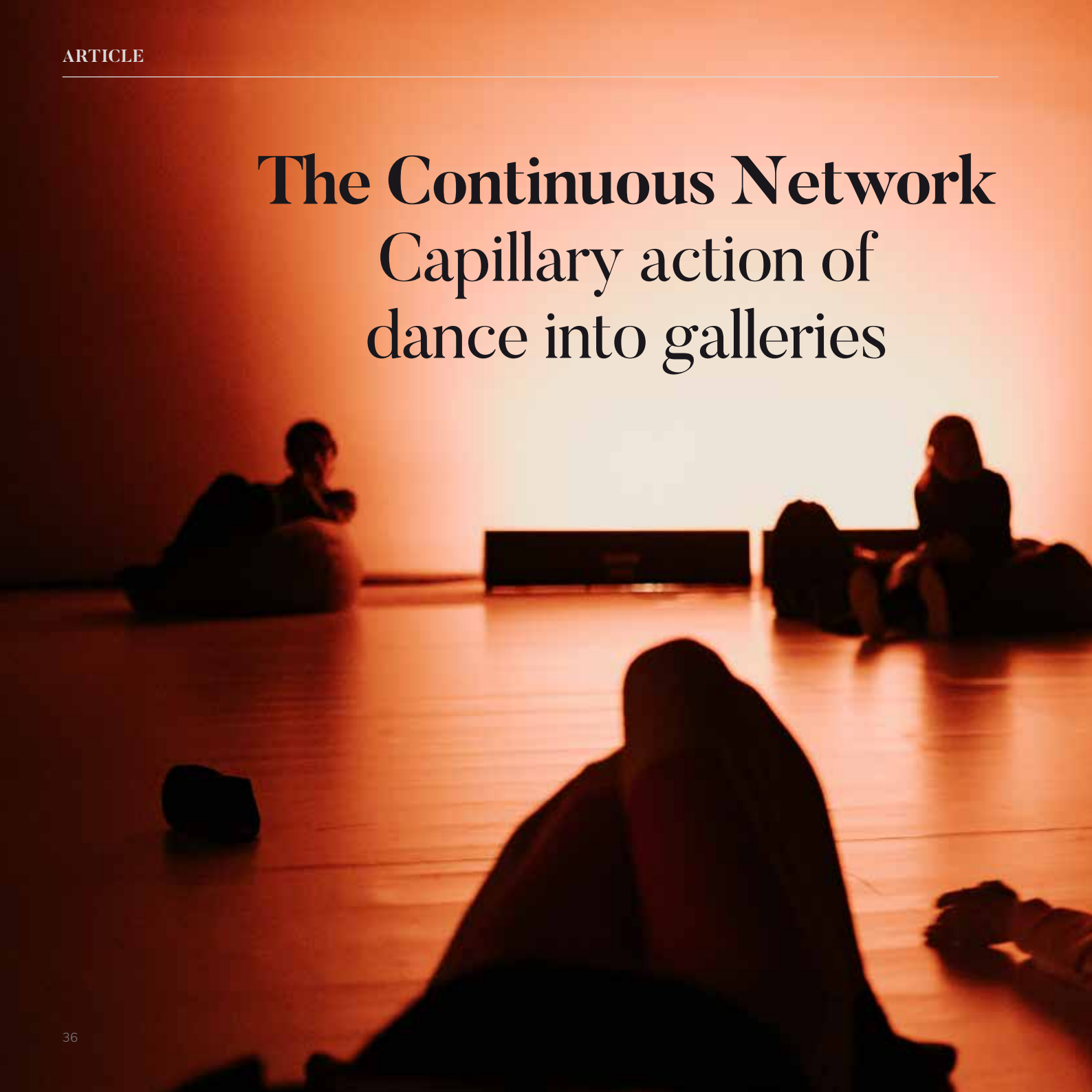
> **The hard-working and tireless body constantly offering itself to the audience**



Dancing machine: Daniela Cruz in *UM [unimal]* by Cristina Planas Leitão
Photo © Susana Neves

The Continuous Network

Capillary action of dance into galleries





Emily May
05 December 2019

Why take dance into art galleries, and what can happen when you do?

United Kingdom

As a performing art, dance is more frequently aligned with the disciplines of drama and music than visual art: when we go to see a dance work, we're more often than not heading to a theatre than a gallery. Yet contemporary dance has long sought to question dance's kinship with the traditional theatre setting, and analyse how it can be considered alongside art-works of alternative mediums. Recent examples include American-choreographer Trajal Harrell – whose seminal work *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church* was the result of a residency at New York's Museum of Modern Art and has since toured to galleries across the world – and Dancing Museums, an EU-funded research project to develop collaborations between dance organisations, museums, universities and local communities across Europe.

The Continuous Network – a UK collaboration between Newcastle's BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and London-based Siobhan Davies Dance – is one of the latest additions to this line of questioning. The four-year project aims to 'create a new approach to commissioning, producing and touring experimental dance within contemporary visual art spaces,' according to BALTIC curator Katie Hickman. Choreographer **Siobhan Davies** adds: 'We thought, instead of dance organisations coming up with an idea and trying to take it round to various galleries, why don't we work together from the very beginning?'

Lucy Suggate: *Spirit Compass* at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art
Photo: Tiu Makkonen

Challenges occur when the dance and visual art worlds collide

To kick off proceedings, the Continuous Network commissioned two choreographers – selected through an open call – to create work to be shown at the BALTIC. The first was **Lucy Suggate**, who premiered her work *Spirit Compass* at BALTIC in October 2019, followed by presentations in Glasgow and Margate; and the second will be **Zinzi Minott**, who will present her finished piece in April 2020.

'By then, we will have chosen two more artists for the next swathe. We will also be introducing a larger circle of galleries to choreographers who have already made works that we feel will suit gallery spaces very well,' says Davies. 'We're trying to get a capillary action of dance and choreography reaching into galleries,' she continues. 'By the end of these four years, the galleries will feel far more comfortable, and more articulate about what they are doing, as will dance artists. From then on they will be able to broker relationships on their own.'

Davies herself is no stranger to exploring the gallery as a platform for performance. Having initially studied art and history in the late 1960s before 'dance took over', the British choreographer believes that 'even while I was making [my] early dances for the theatre, the way I was using space, energy, and mark-making stemmed from my understanding of the same in visual art.'

Davies became a seminal figure in British contemporary dance, making theatre-based choreography for more than thirty years. But more recently, she has moved away from the theatre stage, and has presented her work in galleries including the Whitworth in Manchester, Turner Contemporary in Margate, and London's Whitechapel Gallery. Her organisation has also published the book *Who Cares?* by Sara Wookey, a collection of conversations with artists, curators and directors, who share their experiences of presenting or performing dance in museums and galleries.

For Davies, moving into gallery spaces is 'more of a natural move rather than a complete unrooting', but she does acknowledge that challenges occur when the dance and visual art worlds collide. 'Both gallery spaces and dance initiatives work in methods that the other doesn't know about,' Davies admits. 'For example, galleries have no idea how long it takes to make a performance work. Years ago they would say, 'we've got £200 and we would like a work that lasts three hours in a gallery space, and there's a week to make it.' They weren't being disrespectful, they just didn't know what it takes,' she continues, explaining that this is one of the key aims of the Continuous Network: to promote understanding between disciplines to allow all partners to do their best work.

But how does altering the performance space influence the way dance is made and experienced? In galleries, audience members are allowed to get closer to the performers, establishing a different relationship between observer and observed. 'When I work in the studio I am privileged to see the work of dancers up close, and I know the level of detail that

is inhabiting their bodies. That gets lost over distance and in theatre,' says Davies, noting that this is a personal opinion, and not that of all choreographers. 'You also have to make a choice about whether you want the audience to stay with you, or if you want them to be fluid and be able to come and go as they please,' she adds. 'That has a large influence on how the work is structured. You don't want them to feel as if they're missing out on something if they arrive half way through.'

Furthermore, unlike a black box theatre, gallery spaces may already be filled with other pieces of art. This is not to say that the dance should reflect or react to the visual art – Davies is careful not to say 'relate', as the word can suggest hierarchy between forms – but it does allow audiences to make their own connections between pieces on display.

'I think there's a lovely way in which different disciplines can exist in the same space,' says Davies. 'When an art exhibition is curated, various works are put together. Those works didn't necessarily have each other in mind when they were made. And yet, collectively or in juxtaposition, they start to make a different form of sense,' she explains. '[Similarly], I think I've approached dance-making in relationship to other work as being in juxtaposition, in courtesy, and in excitement with, but not necessarily trying to take on board everything that it is doing.'

Liberated from traditional theatre settings, galleries may enable artists to push the boundaries of dance as an art form. 'Audiences to contemporary galleries often encounter work of various media and may have a less defined concept and understanding of different disciplines. Therefore, accepted notions of dance can be expanded,' says Hickman.

Audiences, too, can expand. 'My desire is that audiences who might not usually go to see dance will come across the artform in gallery situations and therefore enter into it in a way they might not have done if they encountered it elsewhere,' says Davies.

This commitment to audience development can also be seen through the Continuous Network's circle of partner galleries, which currently include Bluecoat (Liverpool), Nottingham Contemporary, The Tetley (Leeds), Tramway (Glasgow) and Turner Contemporary (Margate), as well as dance organisations Dance4 (Nottingham) and Yorkshire Dance (Leeds).

'Having a regional context for the work is extremely significant in creating wider an understanding of dance across the UK,' says Hickman. Davies is equally committed to disseminating dance across the country. 'We don't want to feel like this [London] is the only base we have, because we want to radiate out of here as much as anything else,' she explains. 'You can't do everything here. There are a lot of artists who aren't based in London. We like to make relationships with them and find out if we can achieve more together rather than always be independently minded.'

It's a heart-warming, collaborative sentiment,and suggests that contemporary politics could learn a lot from artistic thinking. •



Lucy Suggate's *Spirit Compass*
Photo: Tiu Makkonen



Photo © Mohammad Ataey

> I felt that dance was important beyond the studio or the stage. That it was part of the wider world.

From company dancer to co-director to CODA

An interview with Stine Nilsen

Sanjoy Roy
20 January 2020

Former co-director of Candoco (UK), Stine Nilsen returns to Norway as director of CODA Oslo International Dance Festival. She talks about past, present and future directions

Oslo, Norway

'I used to joke,' says Stine Nilsen, looking back on her quarter-century in London, 'that I would go back to Norway and become culture minister or something. No, it wasn't serious! But seriously, I felt that dance was important beyond the studio or the stage. That it was part of the wider world.'

Such an attitude will come as no surprise to those who know Nilsen from her decade as co-director of Candoco, the UK's pioneering company of disabled and non-disabled dancers. Yet when Nilsen arrived in London from Norway in 1993, her sights were set on simply on being a dancer. 'There was really only one training course in Norway that was specifically focused on becoming a contemporary dancer, at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts – and I didn't get in! There were other courses in teacher training, but at the time my one thought was: I'm going to be a dancer.'

Can dance at Candoco

So Nilsen went to study at Laban in London, then worked as a freelance dancer before joining Candoco in 2000, where her Laban classmate Pedro Machado was already performing. Her time as a Candoco company dancer was formative. 'It really expanded my vision. I was working with international choreographers, I was teaching. But fundamentally, underneath it all there was this constant questioning about dance, what it was and what it could be.' When company director and co-founder Celeste Dandeker left in 2007, Machado and Nilsen put in a joint application, and became co-directors until 2017.

'There was lots of learning on the job!' remembers Nilsen. 'Commissioning. Running the company. And always questioning. How do we reach the audiences we want to? How do we portray the company? Are we role models? For who? Our shared directorship was really positive for me because we could be in constant dialogue about these issues.'

It was a fruitful time for all – Candoco's record speaks for itself – but for both Nilsen and Machado there came a moment when London was 'taking its toll' on their respective lives (any long-term Londoner will recognise this feeling!), and they decided to step down together, in 2017. Nilsen returned to Norway – not as minister of culture, but to take up an important cultural position nonetheless: the directorship of the biennial CODA Oslo International Dance Festival, where founder Lise Nordal was stepping down.

Forward to CODA

In the intervening years, it wasn't just Nilsen who had changed; so had dance in Norway. 'There was so much more happening,' she says. 'I had actually left Norway at the very moment when its dance scene

> **In Norway we love our national day and our national costume… but there are lots of currents and undercurrents**

started to blossom. In 1993, the cultural ministry initiated a year of dance, and the Norwegian Dance Information Centre was established in 1994, CODA in 2001. Dansens Hus [the national dance house] was founded in 2004, and really got up and running in its current premises in 2008. The new Opera House in Oslo [completed in 2008] has expanded its contemporary work. There's contemporary dance in festivals right across the country – in Hammerfest, in Bergen, in Trondheim, Kristiansand, Bodø (and Inderøy, Såna and even more places I think!) – and theatre has been involving more movement-based work. And there are a lot of younger choreographers coming through, fuelled by an expansion in education and training. It's a very different place to the one I left.'

CODA was by now long-established, and Nilsen continued some of its existing, tried-and-tested formats, such as its parallel workshop programme (the idea had originally come from ImPulsTanz Vienna) and its strand of programming directed towards young people. In 2019 CODA initiated The DEN, the pitching sessions for artists, programmers and producers that have become a common feature of festivals and platforms.

But Nilsen also brought some of the viewpoints that had grown with her in London with Candoco. One was her vision of dance as part of the wider world. Consequently, her first festival, in October 2019, focused not only 'on' dance but 'about' it, including no fewer than ten seminars covering themes as diverse as the decolonisation of criticism, personal and physical boundaries in dance practice, identity in arts and hip-hop on stage.

Another was an acute awareness of the question of diversity. 'With Candoco,' says Nilsen, 'I naturally came to diversity from a disability perspective. But diversity has many faces, and when I came back to Norway from London, what I felt most strongly was a sensitivity around the lack of multicultural diversity. The stage felt very "Blenda white", as we say here: whitewashed, you might call it in English. So I really wanted to put diversity on the agenda at CODA – not in a predefined way, but to put it into the mix of the programming.'

Accordingly, CODA 2019 included performances that spanned the faultlines between the 'third' and 'first' worlds (**Robyn Orlin**'s *And So You See…*), or between the 'old' and 'new' worlds of Europe and the Americas (**Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui**'s *Orbo Novo*).

But as well as bringing in such international works, Nilsen wanted to show diversity within Norway and the Nordic region. Hence the performance of *Noble Savage*, a retelling of the Pocahontas story by Finland's **Sonya Lindfors** – but also, importantly, the Untaming Tradition programme, a day-long event where Nilsen gave curatorial control to three very different Norwegian artists: Elle Sofe Sara, from the marginalised Sámi people of the Finnmark region of northern Norway; Mia Habib, with her familial connections ranging from Norway to Israel; and Sudesh Adhana, originally from India and resident in Norway for twelve years.



Sonya Lindfors' *Noble Savage*, a retelling of the Pocahontas story. Photo © Sanna Kaesmae

'I realised I was interested in artists who had mixed backgrounds in terms of culture, who are dealing all the time with a mixture of references,' says Nilsen. 'It was important for me that they were Norwegian artists, living here in Norway, with interests and experience that are part of the Norwegian art scene. Because in Norway we love our national day and our national costume and we can have this straightforward idea about celebrating Norway and how great we are – but actually there are lots of currents and undercurrents.'

Untaming Tradition

I managed to catch Untaming Tradition; it turned out to be dark in mood but illuminating of such complexities. **Elle Sofe Sara** presented a sketch for her forthcoming *Juohkke nubbi* (*One in Two*) on the prevalence of rape within Sámi communities, chillingly using live performers among dolls, model houses and toy cars to suggest both its normalisation and the silence that surrounds it. She also presented a revised version of her 2010 *Don't Judge a Dog by its Fur*, a bruisingly physical work for three women whose self-punishing pain was almost palpable.

Sudesh Adhana's *Untamed Donkeys* also dealt with rape culture, but here focusing on toxic masculinity in India. Originally performed in outdoor settings across India, it was conceived as a work of raw activism performed by and targeted at men; within the enclosed theatre space in Oslo, with a largely female audience, I wonder if its punches landed wide of their mark. Still, it certainly disabuses Western audiences of



Left: Elle Sofe Sara's *Juohkke nubbi* (*One in Two*), on silence and sexual violence in Sámi communities.
Right above: Caisa-Stina Forssberg in Henriette Pedersen's *PEER/BITCH*
Right below: Set for Sudesh Adhana's *Untamed Donkeys*

any romantic notions of India as a land of yogic gentleness and spirituality, and I am all in favour of muddying those waters.

The most intriguing piece for me was **Mia Habib**'s film installation *The Movie Concert*, which interwove footage from family home movies with documentary excerpts from choreographic projects and newsreels from warzones in the Middle East. The unexpected echoes and dissonances between these strands meshed the very personal with the very political, the individual and iconographic, suggestive of ties that bind the local to the global – an example of how big ideas can fit inside a small frame.

A coda to CODA 2019

Is there a danger that 'diversity' can lead to tickbox programming? 'Yes!' says Nilsen. 'My experience with Candoco made me aware of how one disabled person can get lumbered with representing disability as a whole, and we see in Nordic countries too how readily one person of colour can be asked to represent all people of colour.' To counteract this all too common tendency, she has two main strategies. The first is to programme diverse artists – but to leave their artistic subject matter up to them. 'I'm not so interested in being representative in terms of content.

It's more about an awareness of who gets to be on stage, not what they represent.'

The second is a curatorial instinct to try to balance any work that might be tickboxed with a contrasting piece that might fit the same tickbox. Adhana and Sara's utterly different pieces on rape culture, for example; or Cherkaoui's piece on the New World with Lindfors' retelling of Pocahontas. 'Programming is never truly *not* tickboxing,' sighs Nilsen, but at least this strategy shares out the curatorial burdens of representation – something that I suspect she learnt not only while working with Candoco, but through sharing her directorship there.

'Diversity' is of course just one theme in CODA's far more diverse programme, which included pieces for youth dance, family-friendly spectacle, site-specific and outdoor work, and a blisteringly witty confessional standup by virtuoso soloist Caisa Stina-Forssberg in **Henriette Pedersen**'s *Peer/Bitch* (catch it if you ever can). Yet for Nilsen, diversity remains key. 'I guess this first year I felt a bit like the kid in the sweetie shop, wanting to have something of everything. We will have to balance ambition with resources, but my excitement around diversity will definitely not be a one-off. This has to continue. It goes back to Candoco: always questioning what dance is, what it can do, and appreciating that it takes a diversity of forms. One reviewer said there was a political 'sting' in this year's CODA. Actually, I don't see myself as politically driven, but I'm aware that this desire for diversity may have political results.'

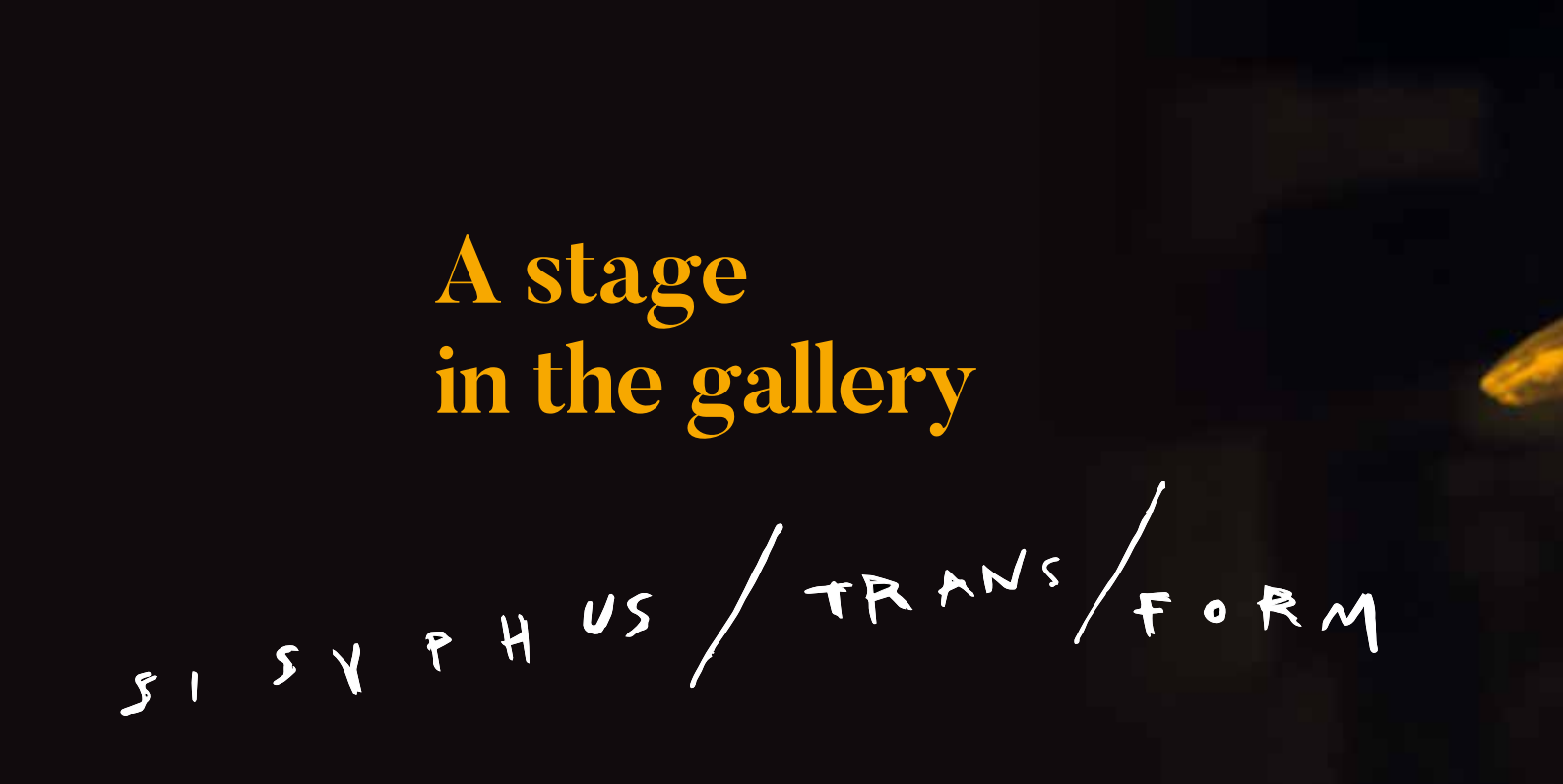
I hope the minister for culture is listening. •



Photo © Sveinn Fannar Jóhannsson



A stage in the gallery



Gaia Clotilde Chernetich
31 January 2020

Dimitris Papaioannou's first site-specific work for an art gallery, at Collezione Maramotti

Reggio Emilia, Italy

All photos © Julian Mommert

'What is wrong with the theatre?' This is the question Dimitris Papaioannou directly addresses to his audience – but we'll get to that later. We're gathered here in the spacious hall of the first Max Mara fashion factory in Reggio Emilia, Italy, after a performance of Papaioannou's *Sisyphus/Trans/Form*. Commissioned by Festival Aperto and Collezione Maramotti, this is his first site-specific piece for a contemporary art gallery – the Collezione Maramotti, an eclectic collection originally started by Max Mara founder Achille Maramotti. As we converse with the Greek art creator – who became world famous for directing the 2004 Olympic opening ceremony in Athens (another, impressively gigantic *in situ* performance), we are enchanted by his ability to unveil new facets of human imagination and reality.

Collezione Maramotti's coordinator, Sara Piccinini, gives us some background history. Their first ever dance performance, in 2009, was Trisha Brown's *Early Works*. It initiated something of a 'contemporary tradition': many choreographers have since accepted the invitation to create for the Collezione's original facilities, contributing to a history of high-level performing arts programming by Max Mara and Reggio Emilia's Fondazione I Teatri. The site-specific dance repertoire has been enriched with new works by Shen Wei, Wayne McGregor, Hofesh Shechter and Saburo Teshigawara. And for Papaioannou, *Sisyphus/Trans/Form* was just an *arrivederci*, as the performance will be touring and his new creation (due to premiere in Athens on 6 May 2020) will return to different Italian cities over the next seasons.





Sisyphus/Trans/Form

Mixing some stage elements from Papaioannou's previous work *Still Life* (2014), *Sisyphus/Trans/Form* is a 40-minute event on the second floor of the concrete building of Collezione Maramotti. Inspired by the ancient myth of Sisyphus, whose destiny is to repeatedly roll a rock uphill only for it to roll down again, the piece displays an itinerant structure combining different elements – visual, corporeal, material. Once upstairs, the landscape is dominated visually by concrete and acoustically by silence – interrupted only by the sounds of the surrounding audience, and by the performance itself, now and then amplified by a microphone held in the choreographer's hands.

In fact it is Papaioannou himself who, as master of ceremonies, magnetically drives the action around by pointing a warm light towards its main focus: a crackling stony wall (that audiences may already have seen from *Still Life*), carried by the performers in turn on their shoulders. We feel their breath as their bodies struggle with weight, effort and resistance. Around them, the gallery artworks are covered with milky sheets of light plastic, impeding interaction with the performance in favour of a mute co-presence.

The attention is thus focused on the performance as a combination of the performers' movements and the illusory visual fragments they create. Technical mastery and fervent imaginative invention generously characterise the work, while shamelessly exposing the secrets of Papaioannou's elegant



handling of illusions. We recognise some of these salient features from other titles of his repertoire such as *The Great Tamer* (2017) and *Since She* (2018, for Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch).

From the moment the performers start passing through the wall, thus revealing its foam-rubbery soul, we feel as if we were in front of a stunning magician, openly showing us secret tricks. Performers Pavlina Andriopoulou, Costas Chrysafidis, Ioanna Paraskevopoulou, Drossos Skotis and Christos Strinopoulos move in a crystal-clear manner while they appear and disappear behind the wall, playing into Papaioannou's aesthetic poetics, where assemblages of body parts compose unusual, mythological and monstrous imagery: men and women with an anomalous number of limbs; broken, elongated, deviated, metamorphic or even impossible shapes that use the interplay between the chiaroscuro and the different densities of the materials as if to invent reality through a series of impossibilities. Articulating light and heavy materials, rigidity and suppleness – but also oscillating between the flesh of exposed skin and the textile armour of black suits and dresses that cover and uncover the performers' bodies – the piece claims a dialogue with both materiality and the spirit.

The space and the stage

So: what is wrong with the theatre? Speaking with us in the gallery hall after the performance, Papaioannou doesn't give a straightforward answer to his question. Instead, he admits to being

Assemblages of body parts compose mythological and monstrous imagery

sceptical about the trend of bringing dance into museums. For when dance enters the gallery, different kinds of artworks coexist, regulated by different hierarchies: historical, disciplinary, spatial, durational... He respects and loves both stage and gallery, but doesn't find it natural or necessarily desirable to mix them, or to force them into a dramaturgical dialogue or even a spatial encounter.

As visitors, spectators or even as voyeurs, we can admire the engineered beauty of *Sisyphus*, but the piece deliberately expresses a desire to see it as theatre – what Papaioannou calls his 'pure' art. In transposing his creation from the theatre's black box to the exhibition hall, Papaioannou decided to cover up the artworks on display, not only to protect them from the unpredictable movement of the audience but also to focus our attention on *Sisyphus*. The space thus becomes a hybrid between the less governed environment of the gallery and the positioned perspectives of theatre stalls, the audience moving to new vantage points as the performance unfolds.

Though Papaioannou still considers it an experiment, *Sisyphus/Trans/Form* nevertheless creates both beautiful images and a strong nostalgia for the stage, where the presence and proximity of spectators and performers is gripping. At its heart, it suggests a discourse on the complexity of freedom and our inevitable human search for it. Exactly as it is for Sisyphus, whose stone falls to be lifted again, and again and again – not until a resolution to his labour is found, but to keep the meaning underlying his gesture of lifting the stone alive. •



REVIEWS



Jefta van Dinther: The Quiet


Photo © Ben Mergelsberg

‘We’re going to tell you some things. It will be like you’ve always known them’.

In the dim light, four women corner a fifth. Their words sound like a promise, as if all the secrets of the world will be revealed. The Swedish-German choreographer Jefta van Dinther has yet again created a world on its own.

When the light finally illuminates their faces, the suggestion that the women are of different generations is confirmed. They are dressed similarly in grades of white, skirts just below the knees, and they walk on grey carpet tiles, surrounded by a steel skeleton resembling a house. Their backs are bent and their legs crooked, like grandmothers who gained wisdom in long forgotten times. But through their slow-motion movement and their arms bouncing as if hanging from a string, they also remind me of marionettes. And dubbing the text that emerges from the speakers gives them something robotic and futuristic.

The multi-layering continuously moves you back and forth between a time far, far away and the present. Sentences like ‘You worry too much. You are ambitious’ appear current, while the ritual of singing around a light from the ground feels ancient. Supported by the pulse of the soundtrack and minimal but effective lighting, quantum leaps in time seem to float around in the same space. This tangibility of non-linear time is of great beauty. Some moments fall through though: when the women take out a tent from under a hatchway, build it up and throw it around in the air, the very concrete yet lightweight material disrupts the transient state.

But these moments are easily forgotten when the dancers start walking in circles in a *perpetuum mobile*; or stand still and raise their hands to the moon; or take up the carpet tiles as if finally to dig up the truth from the earth. In the end, no secrets are revealed, nothing is made comprehensible. *The Quiet* is and will forever be a place of mysticism. •

The bottom line: A serene and dark place of wonder – just sit back and let it happen

Annette van Zwoll
06 April 2019

Quantum leaps in time... a mysterious world holds on to its secrets

Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, Germany

Choreography and direction: Jefta van Dinther / Created and performed by: Linda Adami, Alexandra Campbell, Lisa Drake, Cecilia Roos, Agnieszka Dlugoszewska, Kristine Slettevold / Lighting design: Minna Tiikkainen / Set design and costume: Cristina Nyffeler / Sound: David Kiers, Slowdive (for the track Falling Ashes) / Voice: Lisa Drake / Text: Jefta van Dinther, Alexandra Campbell, Lisa Drake, Cecilia Roos, Mandoline Whittlesey / Assistant choreographer: Thiago Granato / Artistic advice: Gabriel Smeets / Technical coordination: Bennert Vancotttem / Sound technician: Stephan Woehrmann / Thanks to: Anna Grip, Pia Krämer

Co-production: HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin), Norrlandsoperan Umeå, Riksteatern Sweden, Dansehallerne Copenhagen, Centre chorégraphique national de Montpellier Occitanie direction Christian Rizzo, Tanzquartier Vienna, Sadler’s Wells London, PACT Zollverein Essen, Centre chorégraphique national d’Orléans, Theater Freiburg, Festival Montpellier Danse 2019, Julidans Amsterdam

Imagetanz 2019

Claire Lefèvre
17 April 2019

Up close and personal with a lot of orifices at Vienna's Imagetanz Festival

BRUT Wien, Vienna, Austria

For its thirtieth anniversary, Imagetanz Festival's motto is 'dancing 30 years ahead'. Since 1989, the festival, organised by BRUT Wien, has always focused on local emerging choreographers. However, this year's programme, showcasing works solely by women and queer artists, flaunts a radical desire to move into the future with the politics of representation in mind. The curated works display a broad range of performative formats, set in gallery-like spaces, classic black box theatres and even a swimming pool. Within this emphasis on plural perspectives, there is however a common underlying desire for closeness, a prevailing need to create intimacy with the audience. Three pieces in particular stand out with their up-close and personal approach to the moving body, offering equally bold and delicate relationships between audience and performers.

Opening the festival, *OH MY* by Berlin-based collective **Henrike Iglesias**, invites the audience to consider what their dream porn would look like. The performers revisit classic X-rated scenarios and offer a queer-feminist twist on the mainstream representation of intimate desires: a sexy teacher schools naughty students about the anatomy of the clitoris; two girls play with one menstrual cup. Like porn Power Puff



Guilt-free dream porn? *OH MY* by Berlin-based collective Henrike Iglesias. Photo © Paula Reissig



'Solo for two butt cheeks and one anus' – *Sans-Culottes* by Hugo/Robyn Le Brigand
Photo © Franzi Kreis

girls, each performer wears a single colour, fur meeting latex and lingerie in a sensual fest of textiles and textures. The audience witnesses most of the material through live video projection and sound through headphones, cleverly emulating the at-home experience of watching porn on your computer. Their subversions of adult material experiment with pornography as a strategy for self-empowerment. At times furiously humping the set, or playing the damsel in distress with the sound technicians, *OH MY* climaxes when one of the bombshells-turned-cam-girls hilariously lip syncs Adele's 'Hello' with her vagina. Making crucial political statements while remaining sexy and fun, *OH MY* is the definition of guilt-free pleasure.

Equally inviting, *Sans-Culottes* by non-binary artist **Hugo/Robyn Le Brigand** is a 'solo for two butt cheeks and one anus'. With their whole upper body covered in lace and their ass bare, Le Brigand begins by reinventing folk dances from their native Brittany, centring all the ground-stomping movements around the pelvis, and covering the space with bottomless energy. In an effort to challenge the hierarchy of the body, they proceed to invert themselves, head down and ass up, flipping our perspective on their moving form. Like an upside down magic-trick, they swallow an ice popsicle with their butt, making it appear and disappear in and out of their anus. Once the tiny stalactite has wondrously vanished, we're given a thorough anatomy lesson, as Le Brigand lies exposed at the front of the stage, contracting gluteus muscles and hamstrings, opening and closing their anus in time with the beat



Jasmin Hoffer, Sara Lanner and Liv Schellander in *Volume*
Photo © Raffaela Bielesch

of PNL's song 'Sur Paname'. Le Brigand then throws themselves into an absurd and delicate contemporary dance routine, by which time we're completely at ease with staring at their ass. Their obvious skills as a mover elevates this piece tremendously, propelling what could have been a shock-factor performance into an intricately choreographed and gracefully delivered statement about normalising, even celebrating a usually heavily censored body part.

On the other end of the digestive tract, **Jasmin Hoffer**, **Sara Lanner** and **Liv Schellander** explore the potential of the mouth as a choreographic starting point in their collaborative work *Volume*. Once again, a hollow body part's stage potential is revealed, and unexpected anatomical virtuosity ensues. As the audience enters, the three performers are spitting ping-pong balls onto the walls, the floor, and each other, crafting a playful soundscape and giving a few germaphobic audience members a taste of what's to come. There follows a carefully orchestrated display of bodily functions, choreographed drooling, ecstatic biting and delicate teeth grinding. At times filling their mouths with clay or coloured ink, or devouring giant crinkly sheets of rice paper, the three performers have an almost animalistic way of using their faces as hands, their teeth becoming as agile as fingers, completely committed to exploring this one orifice with compelling concentration. Not unlike a trio of vomiting Jackson Pollocks, they also completely disregard good table manners and chew frantically with their mouths open, spitting all over the floor and transforming the bare studio space into a soaked and splashed laboratory. This forensic approach to choreography continues as UV lamps further reveal the traces of their palatable dances. Reminiscent of late-night TV crime scene investigations, the trio glows in the dark while they gargle in what could be both a quiet song and an agonising sigh. Perhaps they're waiting for mouth to mouth. Either way, they manage to bring a delectable sense of curiosity to their work, balancing an almost clinical dramaturgy with drool-worthy creativity and wit.

This aspiration to investigate the body, its hidden organs and its secret desires, with such sincerity, is exciting and fresh. The generosity with which the performers share such intimate findings also reveal new possibilities for a transparent relationship between those who do and those who watch in a performance context. Thirty years on, Imagetanz succeeds in showing a wide range of options for dancing, and by supporting local female and queer voices, helps blow a breath of fresh air into the upcoming Viennese dance and performance scene. •

The aspiration to investigate the body, its hidden organs and its secret desires, is exciting and fresh

Albert Quesada & Zoltán Vakulya: OneTwoThreeOneTwo


Photo © Benjamin Sommabere

Zoltán Vakulya leaps out of his seat, whirling like a sycamore leaf. He's joined by Albert Quesada, and together they twirl and arc, at times close enough to graze one another's skin. The music – a range of classic flamenco recordings – is a layering of voices and claps, with rousing rhythms that give the piece its title. But in Quesada's own words, 'this is not a flamenco piece'.

Vakulya's body vibrates like a guitar string. The dynamic charge of flamenco music is given expression through sudden starts and stops – they move slowly, testing shapes, then in response to a singing voice they freeze as if struck. At times their bodies seem fractured, pulled apart. Vakulya holds Quesada's head as he writhes uncomfortably. The two men have an intimate, yet ambiguous relationship – Vakulya slides his hands over Quesada's ears, eyes, and mouth, and he dissolves to the floor. The whole piece has a deconstructed feel, right down to the costumes: Vakulya, topless, wears high waisted trousers; Quesada wears shorts and a top which resembles a flamenco jacket. They split the piece too, exiting abruptly through a curtain half way through.

Less than a minute later they burst back in to a stab of guitar, covering the floor with skittish footwork. Suddenly they sit again, turning to chat casually to audience members behind. Quesada sidles up to Vakulya and, covering his skin with rhythmic slaps, brings the '12312' rhythm of flamenco rather literally to the surface: Vakulya grimaces in pain even as he offers his back for more.

The staging, with the audience on four sides, mimics a *tablao* but – with raked seats and harsh lighting – has none of its intimacy. It is difficult not to compare the piece to flamenco and find it lacking. In seeking to break flamenco apart, Quesada is left with something weaker. •

The bottom line: Flamenco deconstructed becomes less than the sum of its parts

Alexandra Gray
23 April 2019

An experiment in choreography and staging that is definitely 'not flamenco' – but neither is it something else

Lilian Baylis Studio, London, UK

Concept: Albert Quesada / Choreography and dance: Albert Quesada, Zoltán Vakulya / Sound design: Albert Quesada / Light design: Bert Van Dijck / Music: Sabicas, Miguel Poveda, Manolo Caracol, Camarón de la Isla / Costumes: Sofie Durnez / Programme text: JS Rafaeli / Musical advice: Juan Carlos Lérida / Choreographic assistance: Petra Söör, Leo Castro / Production: Albert Quesada, Klein Verzet vzw / Co-production: Charleroi Danses, CCNR, Mercat de les Flors, Vooruit in the frame of the European Network DNA (Departures and Arrivals) / Co-funded by the Creative Europe Program of the European Union / In collaboration with: PACT Zollverein, Kaaitheater, TAKT/ Provinciaal Domein Dommelhof, STUK, El Graner, L'animal a l'esquena

Queer Darlings 2019

Annette van Zwoll, Evgeny Borisenko
02 May 2019

Camgirls and drag queens, chatrooms and cabaret: two surprising pieces from a festival of feminist and queer performance

Sophiensaele Berlin, Germany

'I LOVE the internet, because I can go ONLINE.' In line with this statement by choreographer Teresa Vittucci, Annette van Zwoll (AvZ) and Evgeny Borisenko (EB) decided to share their experiences of the Queer Darlings festival with each other. Listen in on their exchange below.

Vincent Riebeek's *One of a Kind* starts with a voiceover claiming the space as a world of messy adventure: expect the unexpected. The four bodies on stage, most of the time fully naked or naked from the waist down, slip into alternative gender roles and showcase a parade of transformations, from an adult body with a creepy baby mask to cabaret dancers, drag queens, or even trapeze artists.

EB: I found *One of a Kind* very problematic, because although everything had this radical queer performance flair, it lacked critical distance from queer performance clichés: do a lip-sync, wear a superlong dress then a tight crop-top, sing cabaret, be dramatic, do some artsy namedropping and put a rainbow onstage. It looked like a chaotic catalogue of 'something queer'.

AvZ: At some moments, though, I was confronted with the cultural constructs I have internalised. For example, when they lip-sync and act out this song about a man cheating on his wife and eventually discovering that the man of the woman he is cheating with is gay, the performers change gender roles. I noticed that I got pretty confused when I heard the word 'man' in the song, while seeing what I perceived as a woman on stage. Such a simple strategy, but very effective!

EB: This queer reenactment of a classic adultery comedy was a very ingenious and refreshing attempt to bypass limits of perception and labels. But many of the clichés that were used, although funny, failed to reveal the burning issues underlying these clichés. Riebeek chose to use them as a filler (and not as filter), to fill the show with something dramatic and sexy.

AvZ: I think the context had influence on the impact of those clichés as well. When the performers asked straight audience members to raise their hands while insinuating the performance was more fit for gay people, it felt like straightness, normally prioritised, was being mocked at this queer(friendly) festival. In another context, it might have been more confrontational, but here it sort of evoked a superior feel of togetherness. Actually, that was a slightly uncomfortable moment for me, because it felt like 'us against the other'. But in general *One of a Kind* was entertaining, though didn't give me much in terms of provoking alternative imagery or critical thought on gender.



Teresa Vittucci's *All Eyes On*.
Photo © Nelly Rodriguez

In **Teresa Vittucci**'s *All Eyes On*, a woman sits on a mirrored pedestal, flanked by two hanging screens, with a microwave in the back and a laptop with her on stage. She is not only performing for us, but also for a live chatroom visited mostly by men. Singing pop songs, dancing, playing the keyboard, uncovering her vagina, she tries to entice the men in the chatroom, and us, into connection and intimacy.

> **Everyone can relate to the discrepancy between how you see yourself and how others see you**

AvZ: *All Eyes On* was great on so many levels. It very smartly unravelled complexities within (online) relationships, for example the conflict between the desire for autonomy and the wish to be loved (even by individuals you don't know). It explored a distinctive gendered, heterosexual dynamic: the comments of the men were sexual and sexist, while she sometimes performed a girl longing for validation and connection by pouting her lips and revealing her body. But she constantly shifted in her behaviour.

EB: Virtually anything could happen, but she was always the master of the show. She played with the startled audience by blurring the fiction-reality borders and openly engaging with us while talking to the guys online. She communicated with the audience in a very human and simple way, like when she offered us her microwave-heated lasagna while explaining that it was a bit too hot and that we should take care while eating it.

AvZ: It was playful, but painful as well. It laid bare some of the presumed mechanisms between men and women. Not only in regards to the men in the chatroom, but also when she shared the anecdote about her father telling her that she is an alto, not a soprano, and she should accommodate that. It was funny and light, but at the same time everyone can relate to the discrepancy between how you see yourself and how others see you.

EB: The mirror-covered pedestal played a key role in creating multiple meanings: the mirroring of identities, the supposed truth of a mirror reflection, a pedestal as an instrument of power and oppression. Also remember these two screens: on one we could see the men's comments and on the other you see Vittucci as the men in the chatroom did. So many concepts presented in a multiplied way; such an empowering stage mechanism!

AvZ: And let's not forget the masturbation scene on stage. How often do women intending to display their vaginas in public leave them unshaved? (A 'bush' as the men online commented.)

EB: It seemed like a perfect coincidence that the user 'spermasomething' from the chatroom told her she needed a big dick to shut her up just as she started to masturbate. She reclaimed ownership of her body – no one can tell her to 'shut up'.

Rakete Festival 2019

Claire Lefèvre
29 May 2019

At the intersections between the personal and the panoramic – a new generation of dance artists at the Rakete Festival, Vienna

Tanzquartier, Vienna, Austria

Tanzquartier's Rakete Festival invites a new generation of local and international choreographers and performers to present their work in Vienna. In this second edition, intersectionality seems to have played a crucial role in inspiring the upcoming artists: undercutting perspectives on gender with political takes on identity, each of the pieces reflected to some extent on the place of the makers within a bigger picture.

On a cosmic scale, *The next five hundred thousand years of movement* by Viennese artist **Karin Pauer** proposes a Darwinist approach to choreography, repeating movements over and over again until they evolve and transform. Whether as spooning shrimps or faceless cyborgs, Pauer and Agnieszka Dmochowska are constantly moving and reshaping, while a soundtrack blasts an infinite thread of overlapping questions about the universe and its future.

Zooming in towards Europe, **Mohamed Toukabri** questions his place as an in-betweener, influenced by his Tunisian upbringing and his life in Belgium, in the solo *The Upside-Down Man (The son of the road)*. Mixing contemporary dance, breakdance and ballet, as well as storytelling, he charmingly shares the struggles he encountered as a migrant with an Arabic background who 'did not escape war or oppression but rather was a seeker of knowledge'. Toukabri shares intimate anecdotes and family heirlooms, displays touching home videos and shows off his head-spinning skills in a patchwork of slightly naïve yet disarmingly earnest experiences.

Under Cover, by the Iranian maker **Ulduz Ahmadzadeh**, also tackles the perception of 'oriental' bodies, focusing especially on Muslim women. But she moves away from a solely autobiographical take to unveil a much more intricate understanding of the power structures which are ultimately linked to perceptions of individuality. At times wearing a clear plastic veil that shows each breath as a steamy cloud, devouring bloody pomegranates or smashing tea glasses with her bare hands, she uncovers a multi-sensory experience of what her reality might be like.

Besides these sociopolitical takes on heritage, there were also plenty of tender homages to one's roots, acknowledging the role of family – especially mothers – in the artists' legacy. Toukabri's work featured a striking video of his mother, her long grey hair free-flowing in the wind, while Pauer invited her mother to join her on stage as a dancer. **Sophia Süßmilch** took it a step further, breastfeeding her own actual mother in one of the many tongue-in-cheek chapters of her work *If you think you are a performance artist but you're really just a meme* in which she eviscerated clichés, one artsy stereotype at a time – while Freud was probably turning in his grave.

If these works showed a unique take on the relationship between the maker and the world, two other pieces were especially striking in how they wove the personal with the political, the concrete with the imaginary, walking the line between intimacy and awareness of existing in a global context.

In *new skin*, Belgian maker **Hannah De Meyer** masters the art of switching between microscopic and cosmic scales. Her voice is the first thing to enter the space. 'Hi restless souls, how are you doing tonight?' she asks, before infusing the empty room with mouthy noises and wild stories, titillating our minds to imagine an entire universe unfolding before our eyes – or rather, within our eardrums. She moves with delicate yet minimal intricacy, sometimes a quirky dinosaur, sometimes flowing seaweed, but always as a support to the voice, almost as if she were her own background dancer. She describes phantasmagoric landscapes with rigorous accuracy, taking us on a tour of an imaginary planet, a fanciful museum, and to the moon. She remembers hypothetical ancestors as well as the infinite love of her own grandfather. She embodies a cosmonaut, and seconds later is a foetus, threading whimsical links between the universe and her mother's womb. A story about her grandmother's compassionate plea for her to take a rest meets an imaginary horror scene with limbs floating in a dark cave. This constant alteration of perspectives keeps this minimalist work both vivid and otherworldly. When De Meyer finally spells her desire 'to be born, as a woman, with a mouth, that goddamn speaks!' the impact of these words, on top of all those she has carefully accumulated in the last hour, sweeps over us like a wave, and thus new skin manages to be both thoroughly grounded and out of this world.

Also unique and otherwordly, *Trouble* by Vienna-based **Lau Lukkarila** is a hybrid solo that uses deconstructed language and wild dances as well as humour and vulnerability to criticise the power structures of white supremacist heteropatriarchy. This ambitious exploration takes place in a floor-to-ceiling white studio space, punctuated by a handful of orange coloured objects. Lukkarila enters carrying an orange tent like an extension of their skeleton, dressed in black hoodie and shorts to reveal only their legs, hands, nose and mouth: a fragmented body of sorts. As the sound of Prodigy's 'Poison' rattles the room, Lukkarila shakes and stirs the tent, caressing its nylon body before entering and rocking it from the inside, animating its

Below: Mohamed Toukabri (with his mother, on video) in *The Upside-Down Man*
Right: Lau Lukkarila's *Trouble*





Photo © Vik Bayer

shape in a punchy dance where struggle meets power. Following this compelling introduction is a conscientiously crafted collection of metaphorical sensory images. Lukkarila's hooded character offers us a sip of bleach, before gently using the plastic bottle as a drum, while they remind us that 'sometimes, sugar, you just need someone else' in a goosebumps-inducing song. They re-enter the tent, change their outfit and birth themselves out as a coral-coloured wild child before smoking up the room for a joyous solo dance party. They whip their body with a water-soaked orange towel over a background of melodramatic music, in an ecstatic display of pleasure and pain; and share a video of an inkless tattoo session, where needles and scars meet intimate eroticism. This constant shift between emotional states creates a unique impression of complexity, an understanding that one is part of a contradictory and layered bigger picture. Introspection becomes desirable, and political statements have never looked so intimate. The writer and activist Toni Cade Bambara taught us that 'the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible', and in *Trouble*, Lukkarila manages to do just that.

From Mama to Mother Earth, Rakete offered a truly wide and refreshing take on the usually self-involved tendency underlying solos and identity-based works. Bringing awareness to unique biographies while also staying in touch with the rest of the world, the curated pieces were a promising insight into a new generation of makers who seemed unafraid to tackle the big, even cosmic challenges that we – as a species and as an art scene – are bound to face in the very real and very near future. •

A refreshing take on the usually self-involved tendency underlying identity-based works

Nicole Beutler Projects: Metamorphoses


Photo © Anja Beutler

We enter the stage from the side. Musician Frank Rosaly welcomes us with a hypnotic improvisation on his drumset and we take our places on the stands behind him, facing the auditorium but separated from it by a stretched-out cloth covering the whole proscenium. Seven performers – male, dressed in grey suits and ties – join Rosaly and form a vertical line in front of us. As in a synchronised-swimming routine, they fall flat on their hands in a tight canon, do a push-up, and circle around to start the next collective move.

Choreographer Nicole Beutler sets out to explore the concept of 'manhood' and engage in a journey of transformation. The eight performers draw well-timed patterns in space, lie on the floor connected to one another emulating the prints of MC Escher, then gather to sing Purcell's challenging aria 'The Cold Song' while striking several manly poses. Though their quest is slightly ironic, they all step out of their comfort zone, and the vulnerability this entails is endearing.

Master lighting designer Minna Tiikkainen – also known for her outstanding work with Jefta van Dinther – makes clever use of our position on stage, at times illuminating it from such a height that we feel as if we are in the depths of a cave, the show a shared journey to find a way out.

At last, the cloth rises to reveal an equally evocative landscape. The red chairs are covered in mist and in the back an orange glow-light plays a rising sun. Right in front of it, a fragile tree celebrates a new beginning. Stripped to their underwear, the eight men leave the stage to change into surreal costumes – but the staggered timing of this rebirth partially kills the magic. When they finally descend into the auditorium, the memory of what we have been working on for the last hour doesn't travel with them. A shame, really, for I'd gladly have gone with them until the end. •

The bottom line: A smart take on manhood and the inevitability of change

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
19 June 2019

What's the measure of a man? This performance questions what we are even measuring when we say 'man'

Internationaal Theater Amsterdam, Netherlands

Concept, direction, choreography: Nicole Beutler / Music: Gary Shepherd, Henry Purcell / Performance, co-creation: Felix Schellekens, Dominic Kraemer, Arnout Lems, Sebastian Pickering Pedersen, Rob Polmann, Timo Tembuyser, Christian Gueremathi / Percussion: Frank Rosaly / Costume: Jessica Helbach / Lighting design: Minna Tiikkainen / Scenography: Julian Maiwald / Dramaturgy: Igor Dobricic / Artistic assistance: Justa ter Haar / Dramaturgic advice: Fabienne Vegt / Repetitor, tour management: João Dinis Pinho / Light technique: Julian Maiwald, Prem Scholte Albers, Desirée van Gelderen / Audio technique: Valentijn Berkhout / Second cast: Tijmen Teunissen, João Dinis Pinho / Production assistance: Marijn Maurits / Campaign: Len Rooth, studio I&rooth / Campaign photography: Aisha Zeijpveld / Teasers and trailers: Bas de Brouwer / Pre publicity image: 'God's House' Matthias Haker / Acquisition & tour planning: Theaterzaken Via Rudolphi / Production: Nicole Beutler Projects / Coproduction: Operadagen Rotterdam, Internationaal Theater Amsterdam / With the support of: Ammodo, Fonds 21, Fonds Podiumkunsten, Amsterdams Fonds voor de Kunst

Sofia Mavragani: Afterwords

Anastasio Koukoutas
27 June 2019

Mouth movement makes for an intriguing choreographic experiment, but do we swallow it?

Kivotos Theatre
Arc for Dance festival
Athens, Greece

Concept, choreography: Sofia Mavragani / Performers, co-creators: Chara Kotsali, Giorgos Kotsifakis, Ioanna Paraskevopoulou, Christos Strinopoulos / Original music composition, voices instumentation: Martha Mavroidi / Dramaturgy advisor: Paraskevi Tektonidou / Costumes: Fingersix / Makeup artist: Katianna Hatzilouizou / Lighting: Vasilis Klotsotiras / Artistic collaborator, vocal training: Alessio Castellacci / Photography: Margarita Nikitaki / Graphic design: Dimitris Politis / Production: FINGERSIX

How often do we realise that the body starts with the mouth? Speech aside, the mouth is the centre of our communicative and expressive abilities. When we laugh, we eat, we kiss, when we even sing, the mouth is there. It stretches in anger, contracts in pleasure, gapes in awe. The mouth – a hole, a cavity, a door into one's personality – explains why theatre so often returns to it to explore its immense potentialities. Sofia Mavragani's *Afterwords* places the mouth at the epicentre of attention; it could be called a 'vocal dance'.

Placed front stage, four exquisite performers (Chara Kotsali, Giorgos Kotsifakis, Ioanna Paraskevopoulou, Christos Strinopoulos) start singing. An ordinary beginning, but if you remove the bodies and focus on the mouth, a scandalous and queer image appears: like in puppetry, the mouths become a vehicle to ignite the funny and the unfamiliar. Black lights and bright orange lipstick make the mouths phosphorescent, a bit like the Beckettian 'Not I' but without the existential angst. The performers, a choir of bodies, try to achieve with their voices what often in dance seems achievable only with the body: versatility in space that moulds the relations between the dancers and creates a palpable sense of rhythm.

This 'vocal choreography' lets us see the way bodies relate and exist as genuinely polyrhythmic: whether jumping or falling, interwoven or standing alone, they constantly confirm relations in time



as purely rhythmical, not plainly linear. However, the voice-based tasks don't really form a composition. They are more like shuffled tunes, sometimes sharp and demanding, other times blurry and intimate – like the moment when the four form two couples and sing into each other's mouths, unexpectedly turning the body into a cavity, an echoing instrument, or even better an organ whose interior is rarely approached in dance. Yet this idea of 'voicing' the body is not explored to its limits. It doesn't really allow you to see what's 'afterwords' but rather expresses what has been there the whole time: the body as multiple. •

The bottom line: *Afterwords* hums cheerfully, but doesn't give you the chill afterwards

SPRING Utrecht 2019
‘In many ways, the future is already here’

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
04 July 2019

Name it, hashtag it, experience it… The SPRING festival in Utrecht dives into dance, performance, installation, god, politics, gender – and the future

Utrecht, Netherlands

SPRING is one of the most daring stage festivals in the Netherlands. Taking place in Utrecht – which, together with The Hague, forms part of a megacity-in-the-making around hyped-out Amsterdam, a 20-minute ride away by train – the festival surfs the waves of new developments in performing arts to critically reflect on new developments in the world around them. With an annual line-up of artists on the crossroads between visual arts and performance, this 10-day festival in May (with a shorter edition in autumn) uses dance as a generic trampoline to dive into _____ [*fill in the blank*]. The programme is then organised (or disorganised) around several hashtags which can, of course, be followed, shared and retweeted all over.

AI
#objectsthatmatter #digitalnatives

‘In many ways, the future is already here.’ **Andrea Božic** introduces her immersive theatrical experience *Porocity* before we start. This ‘performed stroll’ takes place in Het Stadskantoor, a centralised public services hub located in the new station complex. It’s a ‘smart’ building with no fixed workplaces, Božic explains, with algorithm-based gadgets that turn it into a sort of living thing. A group of thirty to forty people sets out to get lost in the labyrinths of this now empty building (it’s a Sunday), guided by the performers Matthew Day and Julia Wills. They walk slowly and speak in a soft, neutral tone, looking around while narrating anonymous dreams and using the halls as their landscape. Or they refer to Het Stadskantoor as if we were looking at its blueprint in 2007. Twice, Julia tells Matthew where he can find the bathroom: in *Porocity* we are jumped from past to present to vision to dream, enhancing the sense of this public building as a dystopian non-space, an odd cocoon taken out of a Murakami novel.

Escaping formats and labels since 2000, the always visionary collective **Rimini Protokoll** are a SPRING favourite. *Uncanny Valley* outdid every expectation. If in the past they used a guided tour through Utrecht, conducted over the phone by call-agents in Delhi, to address globalisation, here they kept us in the black box of a conventional theatre. In this alleged sanctuary of authentic presence, *Uncanny Valley* confronts us with its antithesis: a robot looking very much like German author Thomas Melle. Melle – or rather, his recorded voice – shares thoughts about authenticity, identity and AI, combined with comments about his bipolar disorder. ‘What if I could better myself? Are we only human by our randomness?’ Melle tells us how having an android take his place reduces his anxiety, and how the making of its face – a process we are invited to see on video – felt a little like a metaphorical death. The term *Uncanny Valley* refers to the odd feeling we have when an artificial entity seems too close to

> It's like looking at the learning curve of a pubescent algorithm



Kris Verdonck's *Something (out of nothing)*
Photo © Bas de Brouwer

human for comfort, a feeling triggered by unsolved (yet increasingly present) ethical questions, many of which are brilliantly showcased in this project.

Objects also play a prominent role in *Something (out of nothing)* by **ICK** and Flemish visual artist **Kris Verdonck**. In the only captivating scene of the play, fluorescent plastic structures slowly swell up in darkness, producing a mesmerising effect that could last for hours; but it's interrupted by a whole battery of dehumanising stage strategies. Faces covered with geometric masks, dancers-turned-figures embody a tired form of progress. In utter silence, feigning boredom, one proposes a gesture, the other watches, then stands next to the first, repeats the gesture, adds a new one. Etc. It's like looking at the learning curve of a pubescent algorithm. On three occasions we hear the same recorded voice of an Angelus Novus, speaking of doom and the impossibility of turning back Time. An impressive yet excruciating soundscape of electronic noise by Leila Bordreuil closes by killing any remnant of humanity in the room. Verdonck proposes an apocalyptic and futuristic crossover, intellectually challenging and ultra-rational. I wonder what Melle's android would have thought of it.

More evocative was the installation *Polygon* by **Lawrence Malstaf**, a huge yet apparently feather-light structure made of iron tubes – the bizarre skeleton of a camping-tent, perhaps – hanging in a hallway of a shopping mall. Mechanically orchestrated from the sides by cables with weights moving up and down, the structure moves, trembles, has spasms in what feels like hesitation. Instead of efficiency, Malstaf puts AI in the service of human-like randomness.

New rituals
#heybodyhey #edgydance

Setting out to reach for opposites, this year's SPRING also celebrated the more collective, ritualistic aspect of performance, championed by **Boris Charmatz**'s absurdly funny epiphany *10000 gestures*.

On a full recording of Mozart's Requiem, a diverse group of dancers sets out to perform ten thousand unrepeated gestures over the course of an hour. Speeding, they execute their task running in and out of an otherwise completely bare stage, dressed in flesh-coloured underwear, jeans, ninja costumes and corny circus-like dresses. Energy is spilled like wine in a roman orgy as they chain variously religious, abstract, casual, sexual, animalistic, hysterical, iconic, childish and accidental gestures in a non-stop stream. Someone shouts 'MOVE!', then collapses; and three other uncoordinated actions take place a split-second later, no matter what. This overload of choreographic nonsense becomes hilarious once the performers invade our space, shamelessly crawling over our heads while counting in French: 'sept-mil-huit-cents-vingt-quatre! sept-mil-huit-cents...' The proposal is so transparent it can handle it all, and in what feels like a paradoxical state of mental quietness we are confronted only with the absurd yet very present and fleshy sacrifice of their exhaustion.



Photo © Ursula Kaufmann

> The proposal is so transparent it can handle it all



Above: Physical memories reformulated for the stage – *Eviatar/Said*
Left: Boris Charmatz, *10000 Gestures* – a hilarious overload of choreographic nonsense

This simple exercise turned Dionysian feast turns *10000 gestures* into the 'ritual for atheists' that *Attractor* failed to become. This collaboration between the Australian **Dancenorth** and **Lucy Guerin** companies, and **Senyawa**, a music duo combining Indonesian deep-voice singing with electronic and metal sounds, begins with a conventional circle centre-stage. In well-rehearsed unisons, the dancers engage in crafted and flowing group compositions and duets, now and again combined with an intense-looking solo. But while Senyawa's musical constructions are beyond magnetic, the otherwise well-executed choreographic forms lack depth. Not even when a group of audience members joins the dancers on stage in a prepared *coup d'effect*: instead of engaging in any form of togetherness, they are used as amateur props to represent one. *Attractor*'s ambitious programme aims for a visceral experience, in which audience and performers would 'unite in a cross-cultural, shared ritual'. Instead, it inaugurated SPRING on a remarkably shallow note.

Political affairs
#newyoung #genderblender

The last big line of this year's SPRING was about politics, and the microphone was given to the newest generation. In the double bill *Eviatar/Said* and *Rising*, Tel Aviv's independent choreographer **Shira Eviatar** and her collaborators (**Evyatar Said**, **Abat Amrani**) perform their own dance heritage – Moroccan, Yemenite, Palestinian – reinterpreting it within their own youthful positions. Looking at physical memories and reformulating them for the stage, Said's exploratory solo is particularly playful, but in no way innocent. Like a child, he laughs at us, he sings, he jumps, he searches, depicting an intimacy both endearing and politically powerful. Through vulnerability and joy he claims a space. His space.

Speaking not so much from youth as to it, **Permanent Destruction**'s *HM Concert* sets out to break taboos in our very correct daily newsfeed. Singer-songwriter Noemi Velissariou and musician Joost Maaskant triumph in their festival comeback after rocking last year's boat with *The SK concert*. An in-your-face parody-concert combining trap-like musical scores with Heiner Muller-based lyrics, *HM Concert* brings 90s anger back into fashion with mean, cryptic and refreshingly incorrect songs: 'today is pay-day, boys…', 'every (dead) man is a man too few'. Velissariou sings of misogyny, suicide and the wish for a man-massacre on easy beats, surrounded by neon, flashlights, and two male dancers in shorts. Leaving the Horse-Cathedral (yes, that's the name of the venue) I bought a jumper which reads: 'You can't fuck'. It was a weirdly healthy evening. •

Vote for dance: Antistatic Festival 2019

Yasen Vasilev
13 August 2019

The twelfth Antistatic Festival called for a #VoteForDance – but how did its performances poll with our reviewer?

Sofia, Bulgaria

Fittingly for a festival held in the month and year of the European elections, Antistatic's motto was 'Vote for dance'. It brought international contemporary dance to the Bulgarian capital for the twelfth consecutive year, dedicating its first three days to artists beyond Europe – Canada, Israel and Brazil – and the rest to performances from across the continent. Antistatic also featured a parallel programme of post-show talks, warm-ups and educational workshops and seminars, and launched an annual dance magazine in Bulgarian (@dancemageu) – publicly funded and entirely dedicated to the publication of serious critical texts that do not conform to the pressures of the for-profit market.

Below, you'll find seven snapshot reviews from pieces in the festival.

Bang Bang, a solo by Canadian **Manuel Roque**, deals with exhaustion and the physical reality of the body through a set of dances that bring the performer to his limits. Starting with minimal repetitive knee-bending to a beat on an empty stage, Roque slowly introduces new movements that first enter as mistakes and are then incorporated into the score. Breathing and footsteps become a part of the soundscape. There are references to Chaplin and Astaire, as well as classical ballet, modern dance diagonals, folk dance footwork and dervish whirling – but everything's pushed to an extreme until Roque's sweat drips onto the floor. It tests the endurance of the body – and eventually our total focus on the performing body results in the rest of the room melting away, along with our sense of physical existence.

In *The Third Dance*, partners in life and on stage **Oren Laor** and **Niv Sheinfeld** remake a famous 1990s Israeli duet by Liat Dror and Nir Ben Gal, about love and intimacy from an autobiographical perspective. The audience is seated in a square on stage and in the first part the original dance is restaged in a same-sex version, with slight movement variations, to the music of Mahler. The second, text-based part mixes monologues in Hebrew, English and French with awkward audience interactions – at one point one of the two shouts 'Please, fuck me' to a random audience member. A quiet moment of performed intimacy –



Photo © Marilène Bastien


Photo © Pauline Brun

a hug and kiss – follows. Laor and Shienfeld bring in a gramophone and the large vinyl collection from their living room in Tel Aviv. Mahler is replaced by Elton John and the Eurythmics. Pop culture remains the only collective reference point in a falsely post-ideological time where hierarchies have fallen and self-expression has become a dominant paradigm. However, circa 2019, with the liberal order crumbling, this feel-good postmodern utopia is to a large extent self-indulgent and out of touch.

France-based Brazilian artist **Pol Pi**'s solo *Ecce (H)omo* is also a reinterpretation of a historical work, *Affectos Humanos* by German expressionist dancer and choreographer Dore Hoyer, who searched for a universal dance language to express human emotions and presented herself as a genderless creature onstage. The only trace left of *Affectos Humanos*, a collection of five four-minute solos, is a recording of a German TV performance from 1967, a year before Hoyer committed suicide. Today the dance is copyrighted and heavily guarded by the German Dance Archives in Cologne. Pi travelled to Germany to meet with the licensed teachers and to acquire permission to perform the work. As fluid with gender as Hoyer, Pi appears barefoot, in jeans and a t-shirt, buzzcut and clean-shaven, and meticulously performs the solos (on the themes of pride, desire, hate, fear, love) while speaking frankly to the audience about their relationship with the original work. In the process of development, Pi abandoned the original costumes and recontextualised the solos as a contemporary performance piece in which we witness the deconstruction of both language (a whole monologue is reperformed as a non-sequitur) and gender (Pi uses make-up to put on a beard). Shifting between identities, bodies, cultural contexts and historical time frames, Pi is less interested in the universal expression of emotions than attracted to the universality of the artist's tragic clash with reality.

A nylon curtain divides the stage in *Out There and In Here* (Croatia). **Sonja Pregrad** and **Anna Kreitmeyer** slowly roll on the floor in front of it and repeat each other's movements. They graze the nylon with their feet before starting a never-ending generation of movement material that recalls a series of measurements exploring distance and proximity to each other's bodies, to the audience (who are partly acknowledged, partly ignored) and to the performance space (the *in* and *out* of the title). They improvise a somewhat coherent geometrical movement vocabulary, yet nevertheless remain impenetrable. A pause

Left: *Bang Bang* with Manuel Roque
Above right: Pol Pi, *Ecce (H)omo*



with a hug and the sound of bombings in the background suddenly recontextualise the movements. Is this a comment on the war in Yugoslavia? Does the transparent nylon curtain stand for division of formerly united countries? Are these the movements of escaping, hiding, fighting, falling, pushing, protecting, reaching out to or for help? Inspired by Ivana Sajko's *Woman Bomb*, a famous Croatian play about a pregnant suicide bomber, the piece ends in ambivalence with the bodies split in two under the nylon curtain, half way in and out, before blackout. While this ambivalence was sought after, the audience remained unconvinced and the strength of the source material doesn't come across in movement.

Described by **Zrinka Užbinec** as a 'solo of many' (a good four or five people contributed to the research and creation, among which Bulgarian theatre maker Ida Daniel), *Exploded Goo* is structured in three parts and inspired by photo montages. Užbinec meticulously arranges a stage full of peculiar objects: performance lights, mics, cables and colour filters, but also clothes pegs, pink and purple feathers, some green fuzz, construction parts, magnets, ropes, sponges, inflated nylon bags. She then gets naked in the dark, puts on tight transparent top, leggings and socks, sprays herself and adjusts double-sided sticky-tape on different body parts, before rolling on the floor

Above: *Out There and In Here*, Sonja Pregrad and Anna Kreitmeyer (Croatia)
Right: *Tonight I Celebrate*, Uroš Kaurin (Slovenia)

> **Anything can be dance, but you need to have coherent and defendable artistic choices**

randomly picking up some of the objects. An intentionally strange and physically demanding routine begins, which aims to transform the performer's naked female body into a desexualised organic object, somehow in contrast (or not) with the series of mechanical noises, beeps and rattles – a deliberate challenge to our gaze, and a disruption of inscribed meanings. Heavy breathing and the crackle of the tape sticking to the floor add to the soundscape. Beneath the concept that explores politics on the level of form rather than addressing any pressing issues directly in content, Užbinec's trained body and its movements remain recognisable as dance, and a short spoken word sequence at the end ties the practice together.

German duo **Hartmannmueller** use Hamlet's relationship with his mother as their point of departure in *My Saturday went pretty well until I realized it was Monday*. Simon Hartmann plays 90s pop hits on a keyboard with an idiotic smile while Daniel Ernesto Mueller covers his body in nylon and tape, wearing a paper crown and glasses, teaching us a cha-cha routine, calling out for his mum, and writing with tape on a white screen: 'my home is my...'. As we progress through seemingly unrelated acts of quiet madness, 'home' transforms into 'hope' and the whole routine restarts again. Mueller uses large scissors to cut the tape around his body, an act he refers to as 'circumcision', and then puts it on all over again. The sentence on the wall remains unfinished, as does the show. While it occasionally produces good laughs and plays well with expectations and sudden changes in rhythm, the sarcasm seems forced, the performance itself infantile and the dancers not trained enough to act. Yes, anything can be dance, but you need to have coherent and defendable artistic choices, otherwise you leave the impression of randomness that also harms the field.

The festival's closing show, *Tonight I Celebrate* by Slovenian performer **Uroš Kaurin**, is more concert than dance. Dressed and performing as a woman



in the first part, Uroš is charming and clumsy while singing 'Don't let me down', 'How deep is your love', 'Natural woman' and 'Love is in the air'. Midway through the show he leaves the stage and the audience is invited to sing karaoke. When he returns, this time as a man, neutral and completely naked, with a bouquet of roses, he continues the concert with a blank expression that is open to interpretation. A rendition of 'Sorry seems to be the hardest word' finishes with a weird moment of trying to forcibly throw up at the back of the stage. Despite the energy flagging towards the end, it still manages to make you smile and leave you in good mood – truly a celebration of the performing body, and one worthy of closing a festival. •

Julidans NEXT, Amsterdam: performers steal the show

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
15 August 2019

Julidans NEXT offers new opportunities for both artists and audiences

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Julidans in Amsterdam wants, among other things, to be a place of opportunity – both for emerging dance artists, who find it a daring, big partner to help them outgrow their local context; and for those not necessarily bold audience members who can venture beyond their comfort zone on board of this cleverly curated ten-day trip.

For **Anita van Dolen**, festival director since 2011, one of the strategies to open up the festival in this way is Julidans NEXT, a series of solos by emerging artists at the 'Upstairs' studio of the Melkweg, a well-known concert hall neighbouring Internationaal Theater Amsterdam (ITA), the festival's core venue. Each NEXT performance is paired up with a bigger name shown at ITA right after. For example, in this edition Oona Doherty's *Hope Hunt and the Ascension into Lazarus* [reviewed in Springback Annual 2019] was linked to *Session*, a danced encounter between Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and *Riverdance* hero Colin Dunne – a shared Irishness here being the excuse to attract the less experienced audiences to a blind date at the Melkweg Upstairs.

Thus, this small black box space with retractile stands is offered to upcoming choreographers as a chance to show themselves without fuss, in often bare and relatively short performances. This year, Julidans NEXT turned out to be a celebration of the value of individual stage presence: the performers stole the show.

Berlin-based Greek artist **Kat Válastur** presented *Rasp Your Soul*, a solo danced by enticing Italian performer **Enrico Ticconi**. We first see him lying on the floor, bathing under a small light from different angles. He doesn't move, the light does – and with it, our perception of him. This captivating image is the prelude of all that is to come: an hour-long exploration of a physical quality. As if half-struck by constant zapping, fighting with tensions within his body, Ticconi moves over the floor, then across the space. At moments, he sputters out words which – digitally modified – distance him further from a flesh-and-blood character. In his breaking and rebooting we recognise some of the poses: Narcissus looking at his own reflection, or Saint Sebastian, arrows and all.

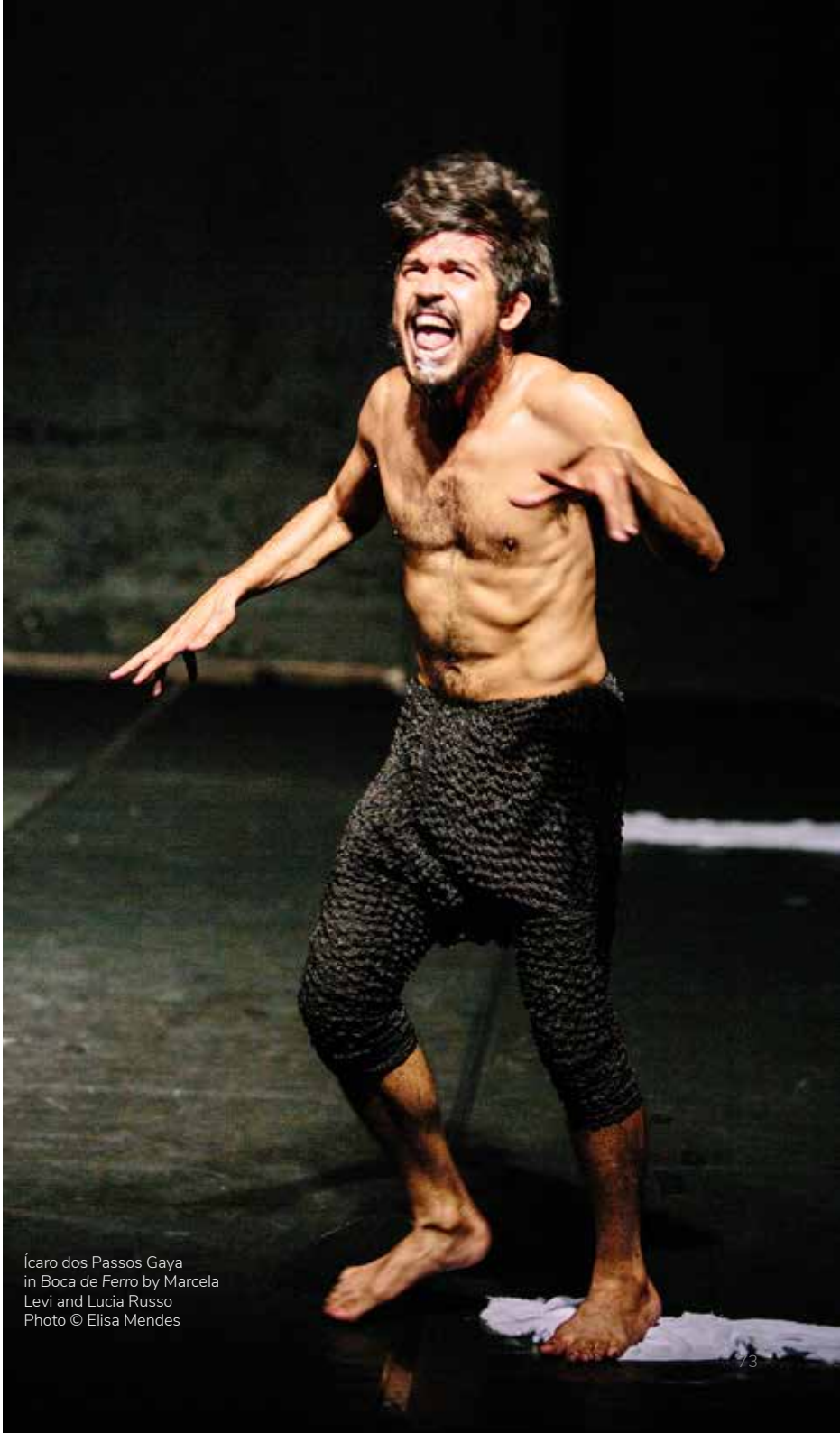
Ticconi is turned into a meme, an iconic avatar of several (sur)faces. Maybe a sad vision of what will be left of our cultural heritage in years to come? But for all his efforts and his captivating presence on stage, the choreographic idea is stretched out for too long. Timing, sometimes, really is everything.

Boca de Ferro, by Brazilian–Agentinian artistic duo **Marcela Levi** and **Lucía Russo**, is a tongue-in-cheek solo questioning black stereotypes. **Ícaro dos Passos Gaya**, dressed as a typical yet modern version of a satyr – moves around and amongst us on an otherwise empty and silent stage. Even though we share the floor with him, there's

no sense of being invited to dance along. He stamps, twerks and swings, setting the energetic excess of a rave on display, sweating, spitting, his eyes unfocused and his body in an unforgiving tension – a slave to a beat we cannot hear, but which we all perceive. A couple of times – what a relief! – a cheesy remix of a Brazilian pop tune breaks the mood, only to fall again into the same pattern shortly after.

Dos Passos Gaya seems to parody an all too current collective phenomenon: only in the club do we profit from the anonymity of the crowd. But at the same time, his moving/suffering in silence to a present yet inaudible beat touches a more confronting reading: he seems like a modern buffoon, asked to dress up and dance in front of us by the choreographers for our amusement. In an interview for the Dutch paper *De Volkskrant*, Levi and Russo acknowledged their love of duality when addressing identity on stage. In *Boca de Ferro*, dos Passos Gaya and his energetic overflow are all there is to see, but through their bold, bare and satirical (pun intended) set-up they expose a stereotypical and critical reading of his appearance too. The 'what' is maybe not so interesting as the 'how'. How do we look at this? And why?

His eyes closed, sitting mid-stage facing the audience, **Thiago Granato** starts moving his hand in his solo *Trança*. He has been there all along, in the shadows, while we walked in. When he moves, we can almost feel him perceiving his hand internally. What a delicate choreographic operation this is. Keeping his eyes closed for the full first half of the solo, he appears



Ícaro dos Passos Gaya in *Boca de Ferro* by Marcela Levi and Lucia Russo
Photo © Elisa Mendes



> It's not always about how we look in the mirror

to be unaware of how he looks to us – and makes a point of this not knowing. What we see, what appears, is defined by a physical quality. And this quality, in turn, seems a product of his proprioception, of the sensing of his movements and body from within. Nothing else.

This is part of the craft, ladies and gentlemen: it's not always about how we look in the mirror. Through inner commitment, movement has the potential to appear as something of its own, like the dancing plastic bag in Sam Mendes' film *American Beauty*. It's a simple yet powerful thing, and in his conscious weaving of one movement with the next Granato proves himself a choreographic artisan, sucking us into a moment of quiet togetherness, all contained in the whisk of a hand. •

Thiago Granato, Trança
Photo © Haroldo Saboia

Earth moves: contemporary roots at Sismògraf festival

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
Clàudia Brufau
16 August 2019

The old made anew: three contemporary choreographers reworking folkloric heritage at Sismògraf Festival

Olot, Catalonia, Spain

The Sismògraf Festival takes place every April in Olot, a 35,000-strong city, two hours' drive north of Barcelona. Surrounded by dormant volcanoes (sismògraf = seismometer; the festival 'detects movement', wink, wink), Olot lies proud on a hill surrounded by lush valleys, right under the shadow of the Pyrenees.

Tena Busquets, the driving force behind the festival, has always pushed for Sismògraf to be immersed in Olot and its whimsical environment. This translates into one of the core themes of the festival: *Dansa i territori* – dance and turf.

Turf can relate to several things. First: site-specific works. Eighty per cent of the shows are freely accessible and most performed in public spaces across town. But turf can also translate into community projects; or into performances which use a folkloric heritage to address contemporaneity. Below, Clàudia Brufau and Jordi Ribot talk about three works in the 2019 festival that explore cultural roots to go beyond reconstruction and towards relevance for today's audiences.

> The dynamics of the contrapàs are turned into a rave

Laia Santanach: Aèr

Aèr by Laia Santanach was presented as an ongoing research: a draft version of the work Santanach is making after winning the Delfí Colomé award (10,000 EUR given yearly during the folkloric festival Ésdansa to a project aiming to combine contemporary dance with forms of Catalan folklore). Aèr is performed and created together with Mario G. Saez, Anna Hierro and Carles Martorell (musician).

CB: What do you think is the core idea behind Laia Santanach's revisitation?

JR: Santanach is a seasoned contemporary performer, versed in everything to do with flow, spiralling movements and the expression of freedom and risk through improvisation. In *Aèr* she took it upon herself to look into something very different: the *contrapàs*, a ceremonial Catalan ronde, originally intricate and two-dimensional, traditionally danced by men on specific dates in public places. I think the tension between both dimensions is the spark that holds it all together...

It's all in the music, really. That's where the tension happens in the first place. I spoke with Laia afterwards, and she told me the musician-performer Carles Martorell did research on the structures and rhythms of the original *contrapàs*. His soundscore, partially created in situ by means of a last-generation electric guitar, proves

paramount to Àer's success, providing a continuous base of binary and ternary phrases, a clear rhythmic link to the folkloric score that is always present.

CB: But it's not only in the music that we find a link. It's not just contemporary choreography to a score inspired by a folkloric theme. Physically, certainly in the first section, the performers embody a form of perpetuum walk holding the energetic field in check, in a ceremonial tempo that very much relates to the religious background of the piece…

JR: Exactly. The small duets and individual bursts of movement happening in the first section spring out of that energetic field without upheaving it, proposing new dynamic games with gravity that paradoxically make the piece lighter. (Aèr means 'air' in medieval Catalan.) This dancing on the threshold, projecting contemporary practices without cancelling the ritualistic dimension of the ancient form, kept me interested the whole time.

CB: This tension is even more apparent in the final part of the piece.

JR: I actually got the chills for a moment! While the musician starts to improvise melodically, yet never losing the rhythmic structure, the dancers hold their (and our) ground. We get to see an actual physical exploration of the original steps and codes, it's the *contrapàs* revisited. Putting this at the end was as efficient as it was conventional. In this, *Aèr* became an exercise of old-fashioned contemporary choreographic weaving, a bit resembling the studies by GN | MC [Guy Nader & Maria Campos] on forms such as the pendulum or the circle.

CB: And the thing is that this climactic, physical build-up comes after a more static, quite long section where images – compositions emulating religious paintings, maybe? – accommodate us in a very different way of looking at the piece…

JR: More theatrical, you mean?

CB: Political, I'd say. Laia has said at some point she changed the male/female distribution in her embodying of these images, inspired by Eli Rekallah's In a Parallel Universe project.

JR: But this is decoded in a narrative way. The contrast between the enigma these images pose to the mind and the purely physical enjoyment of the ending, where the dynamics of the *contrapàs* are turned into a rave, was a big plus for me.



Revisiting the Catalan *contrapàs*: *Aèr* by Laia Santanach



Janet Novás and Mercedes Peón
Photo © Álvaro Serran Sierra

Janet Novás and Mercedes Peón: Mercedes máis eu

Mercedes Peón is one of Galicia's most renowned singers. She researched Galician folk for years, wandering from one small village to the next looking for orally transmitted songs and sounds of old, which she then taught to others. In 2000, she broke internationally with the album Isué, where she gave a personal interpretation to the results of her life-long quest. Janet Novás, a younger Galician contemporary dancer with a growing international profile and a strong interest in constantly questioning the raisons d'être of her own movement, led this project. Mercedes máis eu (Mercedes and I) gathers the sediment of several encounters where, through improvisation, they looked at the particular relationships between the dance of one and the music of the other, both grounded in the same heritage.

CB: While *Aèr*'s approach is quite analytical and as you say based on old-fashioned choreographic weaving, *Mercedes máis eu* is something else completely. How important is the chemistry here between the two performers?

JR: It's everything. *Mercedes máis eu*, was one of the most acclaimed pieces of this edition of Sismògraf. It was quite a mindblowing experience, honestly – a kind of punk rock Galician lament.

CB: That sounds very appealing to me… but besides this wonderful label, how did it work for you?

JR: I feel that they didn't overdo it. Mercedes Peón is a phenomenal stage-animal. No additives needed. And in terms of set-up, Novás made an effort to present their conversation as such: a conversation. Worked on and polished to be humble and seductive, powerful in anything but

> **Quite a mindblowing experience – a kind of punk rock Galician lament**

a masculine way, this piece really allowed the energetic heritage of Galician spirits – these 'genderless entities of the *No-mundo* [the hereafter]' as Mercedes Peón called them during the piece – to become apparent in a contemporary fashion.

CB: Where did the link with tradition or heritage come from?

JR: From this humble presence, I guess. And from music and movement, of course. Using the codes, tones or ways stemming from Galician folklore, Novás and Peón presented themselves both as performers and carriers of that legacy, another link in a very long chain. It's as if they just wanted to state: 'I am Mercedes, I am Janet, and this is where we come from'. So simple and yet....

CB: ... touching...

JR: Yes.

CB: I didn't have the opportunity to see this piece, but I can hear you had a blast with it. Apart from their powerful relationship and the music and movement, were there other elements that drew you towards their universe?

JR: A lot of what made this piece so inviting was in the structure. There were moments of loaded physical exploration – where Novás got lost in her own movement for example, tip-toeing around the space, twitching her limbs, breathing loudly as if in a trance, accompanied by Peón's voice (and drums, and bagpipe, and rocks, and *pandereta*). And then there were well-placed moments where the focus was brought back to the plain reality of the exercise. One or the other would stop the action, and while one would explain some conversation they had had during the course of their research, the other changed clothes or drank water. This brought down the mysticism and allowed us to experience their actions as something present, like the smell of the two bags of earth that Novás scattered on stage at one point, to dance upon it.

Sharon Fridman and Kukai Dantza: Erritu

Jon Maya founded Kukai Dantza in 2001 to build bridges between Basque dance and contemporary choreography, and has invited renowned choreographers such as Cesc Gelabert and Marcos Morau to create for his company of dantzaris trained mainly in Basque dances. Erritu ('ritual', in Basque) is the outcome of a collaboration with Sharon Fridman, an Israeli artist based in Madrid. Fridman's works are highly physical and based on contact improvisation technique. His choreographic style is virtuosic and filled with jaw dropping portées, and his pieces usually convey spiritual connections between dancers through the complex harmony they embody as a group.



Kukai Dantza in *Erritu*
Photo © Premsa Sismògraf Olot

CB: We experienced this encounter between Fridman and Kukai at midnight in the crater of the Montsacopa volcano. The atmosphere couldn't be more picturesque. When we arrived, an already exhausted *dantzari* was executing a cabriole over and over again on the stage placed at the middle of the crater. On a corner, the countertenor David Azurza projected a phantasmagorical presence singing a dark, high-pitched tune which flowed around the *dantzari*'s gasps. Did you enjoy this long, sustained beginning? Do you think it was worth it?

JR: Yes. The duration allowed us to include the scenery in our perception, while the repetitive song and Azurza's evocative classic voice set the stage for something truly ceremonial. The sacrifice of sorts of the dancer, his sweat, his breathing... this beginning really tuned in with what Kukai set out to create: a ritual, through dance, in connection with nature.

CB: *Erritu* unfolds into a tapestry of ceremonial sculptural group dances. I had the feeling that the elegant stiffness of the *dantzaris* – five men and two women – struggles to adapt to Fridman's more bendable flow of movement ingrained in the choreography.

JR: I agree, it never became more than a fight between two styles. It actually looked a bit like mixing oil with water: the frontiers between the two qualities, the choreographic instructions and the poetic universes remained clear.

CB: ...and perhaps my expectations were too high for this piece, because I follow both Kukai Dantza and Fridman's work with interest.

JR: I wasn't familiar with their work but I think this didn't level the expectations of its own set-up. The cold night in a lush, green crater, together with an extensive light, sound and smoke design – even the intense and theatrical presence of the singer... it was a lot to live up to. The whole choreography looked and felt forced, while *Erritu* wanted, precisely, to work towards a collective, organic and cathartic experience, certainly towards the end.

CB: Yes, at the end the ritual opens up. The *dantzaris* hold hands in a circle and one by one they are joined by choir singers who walk in from the audience. The piece draws a very clear arc: from one dancer jumping alone to a community holding hands. Formally, the message is clear: the ritual is about reaching the others, a celebration of togetherness.

JR: and yet... I got more chilled by the cold than what was happening on stage.

CB: The more I think about *Erritu*, the more I wonder about how that alchemy between traditional and contemporary dance can work. It has definitely something to do with density, with how a movement can be loaded with stage presence or the ghosts of a cultural heritage. But in the end, whatever colours this magma, it also needs to be brought to today's stages (or craters!) with a choreographic strategy that lets it come alive for the audience. •

> **I wonder about that alchemy between traditional and contemporary dance**

Six of their sex: female dancemakers at ImPulsTanz 2019

Claire Lefèvre
19 August 2019

A choreographic variety of women's work at ImPulsTanz Vienna

Vienna, Austria

Contrary to popular belief, the contemporary dance microcosm is just as impacted by patriarchal values as the rest of the world. However, female makers are gradually emerging from the shadows and painstakingly given more opportunities to share their work. In 2019, it's exciting to see that the programne of ImPulsTanz in Vienna, while still predominantly cis-gender and white, features a balanced number of works by both male and female makers. In an ideal world we would be beyond binaries but for now let's celebrate progress and give focus to six works made by women this year.

In her new work *Tank*, **Doris Uhlich** takes us back to the future. Inspired by sci-fi blockbusters and 1950s Test Tube Girls comic books, she submerges herself in a smoke-filled life-size glass vessel. Reminiscent of cinematic classics like *Alien* or *The Shape Of Water*, this enigmatic tube gradually reveals its hazardous content: first a bunch of brown hair caresses the transparent surface, followed by a sweaty palm, and soon an entire pulsating body comes smashing against the glass wall. As Uhlich shakes to the beats (by electronic media artist Boris Kopeinig), her muscles flex and her naked flesh ripples, creating the masterful illusion of a floating body. 'Robots don't sweat,' she reminds us, her own body drenched and throbbing, and when she finally exits the tank we are confronted with her blatant corporeality and our voyeuristic tendencies: it's much easier to objectify someone trapped behind glass than to indulge in their vulnerable humanity. *Tank* intelligently juxtaposes present and future, questioning the place of the body in an ever-evolving technological world.

Mira Kandathil and **Annina Machaz** also question our upcoming fate in *Ask the Oracle: The Future is Now*, by looking at what a contemporary oracle may resemble. Galvanising Greek mythology, they channel the seers Cassandra and the priestess Pythia of Delphi, inventing a phantasmagorical world where they simultaneously become TV game show hosts and astral deities. In an explosion of red glitter and fake blood, Kanthadil and Machaz engage in incomprehensible yet riveting rituals. They constantly flirt with the ungraspable, piling up chimerical symbols upon art history references, titillating our incurable longing for certainty. We are left with prophecies such as 'Shit happens' or 'Google my mind' as well as forms to fill in after the show, with questions for the Oracle. I am still waiting for my telepathic response.

In *BLINK – Mini unison intense lamentation*, **Michelle Moura**, accompanied by **Clara Saito**, offers a radically different perspective on the idea of vision. Using the act of opening and closing one's eyes as a starting point, the Berlin-based Brazilian choreographer plays with binary oppositions: two bodies gently undulate, opening and closing themselves and their eyelids, to a mesmerising

‘Robots don’t sweat,’ she reminds us, her own body drenched and throbbing

accumulative score. Ecstatic faces morph into melodramatic masks in an instant, butt cheeks flash and the lights flicker into choreographed floor patterns. In the second half of the work the two performers hum and harmonise while their voices are electronically modified, keeping on with the restless transformation process. The sound grows louder into a cathartic build-up – and in the blink of an eye it’s gone, echoing the startling dynamics of the entire work.

Eyes-closed dancing also features in **Claire Croizé**’s *Flowers (we are)*, where three dancers stumble blindly on stage to the sound of **Matteo Fargion** and his daughter Francesca’s two pianos, voices and synthesisers. While Fargion’s dainty reinterpretation of Bach’s music offers surprising versions of works such as the Well-Tempered Clavier or twisted extracts of the Goldberg Variations, there’s an unfortunate lack of contrast between dance and sound. The performers’ co-dependent relationship to the music renders the score frustratingly predictable instead of highlighting its richness: the trio of talented dancers seems to chase every single note with their steps, in a gesticulating rococo trance. Obscure narrative references to the biblical tale of Tobias and verses by Rilke further confuse this hectic tale, and by the time the five protagonists carol a hilarious song about JS Bach, we are no longer following the thread through this labyrinthine work.

A vase of fake flowers and her naked body covered in a piece of sheer neon-orange fabric. That’s all it takes for **Teresa Vittucci** to both embody and dismantle one of the



Doris Uhlich: *Tank*
Photo © Axel Lambrette

most iconic feminine figures of all times: the Virgin Mary. In *Hate Me, Tender* Vittucci takes a close look at the myth of the immaculate conception and its tenacious influence on our society’s perception of women’s bodies and their purity (or lack thereof). From the very beginning, the Zurich-based Viennese choreographer, engages in her own performative miracles: with meticulous shifts of facial expression, she converts into a blushing bride, an agonising martyr or a sculptural *pietà*. One look at us and she’s suddenly the charming girl-next-door inviting us to sing along with her, chanting ‘you are pure ’cause you’re a virgin’. She throws a few plastic flowers in the mix, and Beyoncé’s epic twin pregnancy announcement springs to mind. Palm leaves turn into guns, and her skin-coloured high-



Dismantling virginity...
Teresa Vittucci's *Hate Me, Tender*
Photo © Yoshiko Kusano

heeled boot becomes a make-belief vulva. She's credible as both madonna and whore, as well as sex-ed teacher extraordinaire when she tenderly breaks down the myths of virginity, one scientific misconception at the time, graciously ripping apart the hymen as a symbol of chastity. The work is deeply layered with smart humour, audacious imagery and bold political statements, and Vittucci's performance is, well, sort of divine.

> **Distressing memories are not set in stone, but have a dynamic life of their own**

The audience sits in two rows all around the stage in **Juliana F May**'s *Folk Incest*. One woman is hit by a spotlight; she begins to stutter, nervously repeating words, struggling to complete a coherent sentence. Smearing pink lipstick and eyebrow pencil all over her face, she's both pathetic and clownish, her sudden Tourette-like bursts of anger bone-chilling. This first scene already addresses and subverts the topic of trauma: language is used to fragment words and memories, interlacing text with absurdity and poetry. Four more women enter the room, and they all embark on an intricately composed score, where movements and text are juxtaposed with scrupulous detail. Power-walking imaginary dogs or leaping across the stage while putting on denim jeans as cardigans, the five performers simultaneously repeat discombobulated and intimate stories about adults and toddlers, Nazis and Jews, modifying the words ever so slightly with each recurrence. Abruptly interrupting this complex polyphony, they all harmonise 'Don't fucking do it' while moving in a multi-directional unison. Think rape-choir meets trauma aerobics meets creepy nursery rhymes. A mellifluous healing circle appears and vanishes within the rigorous cacophony, solos emerge and dissipate, until they finally all get down on one knee and offer a perfectly synchronised Shakespearean recitation of the whole obscure story they've been constantly manipulating in front of us. It is rare to watch works about trauma in general, and women's sexual traumas in particular, that transcend pathos and transpose this violent experience into a creative space where irony and lightness can also appear.

But what *Folk Incest* mirrors with absolute brilliance is the unfiltered complexity of traumatic experiences, and the way distressing memories are not set in stone but have a dynamic life of their own. May and her cast leave you shaken to the core, not because of their raw vulnerability – although that is there – but also because they manage to shift the discourse on a topic that too often is either grossly simplified or disturbingly romanticised. •

Slow and gentle: Santarcangelo Festival 2019

Marie Pons
27 August 2019

Performances at the Santarcangelo Festival stir our sense of being and feeling

Santarcangelo, Italy

An unplugged cello concerto in a Byzantine church, an outdoor cinema screening of Mary Poppins, an ongoing queer performance in a gymnasium and an attempt to save an Italian folk dance – one can experience it all in a single evening at the wide-ranging Santarcangelo Festival in northern Italy. Finely interwoven into the very lives of the city's inhabitants, this year's edition, curated by **Eva Neklyaeva** and **Lisa Gilardino**, is subtitled 'slow and gentle', and unfolds as a succession of documentary performances, participatory experiences and individual rendezvous during which the spectator's body, gaze and feelings are alternately cared for and shaken up.

The performances centre on the Piazza Gagnelli, but also encompass schools, parks, small streets of the old town, or a deserted grocery shop. And as the festival infiltrates the city, the city itself becomes the subject of several pieces. From small performative gestures such as **Valentina Medda**'s *Healing interventions for domestic wounds* where the visual artist mends the old walls of the city by carefully placing acupuncture needles into its cracks, to the schoolchildren reading the future in our palms, experiencing the festival means encountering the living souls of the city and their peculiar, sensitive stories. Think of a gang of Italian grandmothers welcoming us to a temple dedicated to the departed grandmother of Swedish artist **Markus Öhrn**. Over the course of a four-year project, they had worked to subvert their role as *azdora*, meaning 'she who rules' in the dialect of Romagna, the women being the pillar of the household and circumscribed to a certain role. They had formed a black metal band, recorded an LP, toured, destroyed washing machines and designed tattoos, among other things. Now the azdoras, faces painted white with dark circles around the eyes and mouth, are the keepers of a shrine dedicated to Eva Britt, Öhrn's grandmother from Lapland. The final step of the project involves travelling to Lapland to gather around Eva Britt's thumb. An adventure that goes way beyond the artistic project and, from their own words, has changed their lives as well as their families'.

In the documentary performance *Lighter than a Woman*, Estonian artist **Kristina Norman** brings to light another figure of the community: the *badante* – women from Eastern Europe who have migrated to Italy to take care of the elderly. Norman talks and draws live, sitting at a desk on stage that resembles her atelier in Tallinn. She and her collaborator **Erik Norkroos** share extracts of documentary films to give the floor to the badantes and the Italian families they work for. A beautiful and complex narrative emerges, made of a mix of loneliness, uprooting, love and sacrifice. Through this multi-media presentation, Norman manages to tackle the several layers intertwined in each personal journey, where the political meets the intimate.

Travel to Santarcangelo was supported by CTC -> CTi (Create to Connect -> Create to Impact), co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union



A collective gesture of saving the dance's memory

Also diving into the history of the region, choreographer **Alessandro Sciarroni** undertakes a movement of preservation of the local *polka chinata*, traditionally danced by pairs of men who hold each other by the shoulders and start to spin fast, knees bent low. Only a handful of men still know how to dance it, so *Save the last dance for me* took place as a collective gesture of saving the dance's memory – first through an open workshop, then as a performance by Gianmaria Borzillo and Giovanfrancesco Giannini, dancing to the sound of electronic music on a basketball court in the city, or late at night on a dancefloor out in the woods. Here too, a meaningful process and approach leads to a moving result in the sharing of a dance.

Silvia Calderoni and **Ibenia Caleo**'s *Kiss* is rooted in a re-enactment of Andy Warhol's 1963 film of the same name, in which couples of different colours, genders and orientations kiss for several minutes in close up. Here, 23 young performers gather in a local gymnasium to give themselves over to a long duration ritual: kissing one another repeatedly. *Kiss* is the endless repetition of this one single movement, a gesture of love copied and pasted for several hours. *Kiss* is an open space where we can come and go as we please, stay for as long as we wish. The performers, in sporty 80s outfits with printed leggings and neon tops, keep this space very much alive by renewing the gesture over and over again, coming in and out of the space,

Above: Alessandro Sciarroni stages the *polka chinata* in *Save the last dance*
Right: The youngsters of Silvia Calderoni and Ibenia Caleo's Kiss
Photos © Claudia Borgia / Chiara Bruschini

dancing humorous short solos that resemble birds' mating dances. As we sit on benches and cushions at the borders of the space, several impressions come one after another. Our inclusion in such a web of intimacy. A heatwave. All of them being young and beautiful, the question of desire arises. The feeling of being part of a safe space, in which everyone is able to kiss anyone, an ideal queer world. In the end, a wave of empathy and love that – when we go back out to reality – we wish could seep out to infiltrate every other layer of our society.

Another characteristic feature of the festival were performances to be experienced either alone or one-on-one. As part of the Create to Connect -> Create to Impact network, two of them were particularly striking. In *Sparks* by **Francesca Grilli**, the children of Santarcangelo take charge of us. We have a set time to meet one of them and on arrival, a child in a silver cap leads us in to sit on the floor. The peak of the cap slides down and covers the child's eyes, who instantly becomes a kind of superhero, as if accessing another layer of seeing, another way of meeting us. There begins a short session of palm reading that ends with a philosophical question suspended in mid-air, for us to live with when we go back into the city. *Sparks* is like a small disruption in the rhythm of daily life, a pause that deeply connects two strangers for a brief time and gently shakes up habits, simply in the gesture of giving your hand – metaphorically, your destiny and expectations – to the care of a child, and listen to their words. *Sparks* is a timely reflection on the weight of children's voices to be heard, mirroring real-life figures such as Greta Thunberg and Youth for Climate, who take the immediate future into their own hands.

The second one is *The Floaters* by Milan-based art collective **MACAO**. For forty minutes, one is invited to lay down in a closed container filled with saline solution that allows the body to float completely. The installation is a constructed black rock with a cave carved inside, revealing a red bathtub. The lid of the cave closes as we enter the bathtub, leaving us to lie in total darkness, to rest in stillness. *The Floaters* is a moment of self-care and surrender, as well as a meditative trial, where one can experience the unusual sensation of letting go – even of one's own weight. Going out of the cave, back into the July heat, we sense that our bodily rhythm has significantly slowed down, and notice that discrepancy with the city and passers-by. It feels as if the festival's motto of 'slow and gentle' has finally truly sunk in. •

A pause that deeply connects two strangers for a brief time and gently shakes up habits



Oona Doherty: Hard to be Soft – A Belfast Prayer

Annette van Zwoll
28 August 2019

An attempt to heal the trauma of the collective Belfast body produces mixed results

Tanz im August, Berlin

Concept & choreography: Oona Doherty / With: Oona Doherty, John Scott, Sam Finnegan and extras from Berlin / Set & lighting design: Ciaran Bagnall / Soundscape: David Holmes / Film & photography: Luca Trufarelli / Video projections: Jack Phelan / Production management: Paul Rooney, Eoin Kilkenny / Stage management: Siobhan Barbour / Producer: Una NicEoin / Coordination extras: Fidan Şirin


Photo © Dajana Lothert

Oona Doherty moved to Belfast in 1992, aged ten, before the Northern Ireland Peace Process had started. Her four-part performance *Hard to be Soft* is an attempt to heal 'something of the trauma being held in the collective Belfast body'. A monumental cage covering the stage serves as a church – a place for comfort and redemption, but also a cause and pretext for tearing the city apart.

Doherty first presents as the masculine figure of her solo *Hope Hunt*. She rises up, her body leaning heavily into the floor and moving smoothly to serene tones. Fighting and crying intrude on the soundtrack, as she pronounces words with a crooked mouth while her body accumulates anxiety, hurt, fear. The telling solo sweeps between the comforts of religion and the violence of the Belfast streets.

A group of young women (local performers from Berlin) appear in white pants and shiny jackets. They move collectively, their faces signalling fearlessness, beauty, coolness. Are they representing the empowering women we heard about on the soundtrack, who go through so much shit but put on a face of success and make light of tragedy? The performers are sympathetic, but with no personal connection to the story, unconvincing.

In section three, two men stick out big bare bellies as they meet in a tight embrace. Accompanied by a father–son dialogue ('you forgot where you came from'), they push, fight and love, their incapacity for intimacy made flesh. Yet the moment is broken by forced movements, and we lose the connection to the body's story.

Doherty returns with powerful movements. By simply opening her arms, she reveals her surprise at the world she landed in, though the mimicking feels like an unnecessary repetition of the first solo. Doherty walks off, leaving a voice to recite her poem *A Concrete Song*, but an unexpected technical glitch forces an early finish to the performance. A disappointing way to end, as the piece itself has been somewhat disappointing.

The bottom line: A telling solo on consolation and violence leads to lesser achievements as the piece wears on

Gunilla Heilborn: The Wonderful and the Ordinary

Emily May
30 August 2019

A work in which the ordinary surpasses the wonderful leads to wonderings about words

HAU1, Berlin, Germany

Concept: Gunilla Heilborn / Text & choreography: Gunilla Heilborn and the performers with Kenneth Bruun Carlson, Pia Hierzegger, Lorenz Kabas, Monika Klengel, Kristiina Viiala / Lighting Design: Minna Tiikkainen / Stage design & costume making: Katarina Wiklund / Original music & sound design: Kim Hiorthøy / Video technician & sound: Mårten Nilsson, Jonas Holst / Production Management: Emelie Bergbohm

In a t-shirt and plain blue boxers, a grey-haired man walks unassumingly to the front of the stage. He addresses the audience in a calm voice about ancient peoples who used to train their memory. 'We now have other ways of remembering things,' he says. 'We store them in The Cloud.'

His pensive, at times comic musings are a fitting introduction to *The Wonderful and the Ordinary*, by Swedish choreographer Gunilla Heilborn. The piece, for five performers, is an exploration of memory, and seeks to discover methods for remembering the humdrum moments that are often less likely to stick in our minds than the spectacular.

The poetry of the piece derives mainly from its scenic elements (perhaps unsurprising, since Heilborn is also filmmaker). The smoke that pours on stage as performers describe and stumble through their 'mind palaces' (an imaginative method for remembering large amounts of information) seems to symbolise clouded memories. Another scene shows partially-obscured videos on the back wall, like half-remembered incidents.

With the exception of a humorous party scene in which three blank-faced performers execute awkward hand gestures and stylised walks in unison to disco music, the entirety of *The Wonderful and the Ordinary* is made up of naturalistic movements and spoken word. Organised awkwardly together into stilted scenes, sentences,


Photo © Johannes Gellner

assertions and mundane memories are consistently delivered in unemotional, monotone voices, as are strange, out-of-place songs about asparagus.

These monotonous moments are at times contrasted with more bizarre scenes, such as a recreation of an armed robbery from an Al Pacino film. However, the 'wonderful' aspects of the show are few and far between. This creates an overall atmosphere of blunt matter-of-factness and deprives the performance of progression. It also leads me to question: can't any of these verbal ruminations be translated into movement? Why do choreographers feel the need to verbalise their ideas rather than present them in the body? Have we lost the art of philosophising physically?

The bottom line: A text-heavy production on memory which values scenic elements over choreography

Radical empathy, real engagement: Take Me Somewhere 2019

Róisín O'Brien
03 September 2019

Dance artists at Glasgow's genre-crossing festival of experimental performance

In 2015, Glasgow venue The Arches was forced to cease operations when its nightclub, which had supported much of its programme, was shut down. The Take Me Somewhere festival was launched in 2017 to build on the venue's legacies. Artistic experimentation is key and programmed pieces are categorised as 'performance', rather than strictly demarcated as theatre, dance or music.

Consequently, the dance artists featured in Take Me Somewhere not only work with other media, but also question the very nature of performance: why do we gather in these contexts? Could there be other reasons apart from spectatorship and spectacle? Many of the pieces presented offer different proposals for collective action and engagement, from (un)comfortable audience interaction to radical empathy and kindness.

Farah Saleh dives into the abyss into which British politics has fallen in *Brexit means Brexit!* Dancers Robert Hesp and Tanja Erhart open the piece standing apart on stage, fraught. After a choreographed interlude where they tussle and pull at each other, Saleh asks the audience to come onto the stage; rather than judge, they must join in.

This movement from viewer to actor is fitting for a piece exploring a political moment that has not only exposed divisions hidden within vastly unequal living conditions and behind social media bubbles, but exacerbated them. By bringing bodies together into a space, disrupting their preferred arrangements, Saleh creates a powerful physical connection that differs sharply from the inanity of constantly updating broadcast news and personalised twitter feeds. It is powerful in principle, though in this context the audience is notably one-sided: 'not all Brexit voters are racist' fails to achieve genuine understanding, as it presumes the leave voter is still, nonetheless, wrong.

In **Ivo Dimchev**'s *P Project*, audience members are invited on stage and, in exchange for money, asked to perform different acts (from writing poetry to fully simulated naked sex). No dancers are allowed up to perform, only those less at ease in their bodies.

Is this exploitative? Does the fact that it knowingly exploits audiences change things? Dimchev is totally at ease on stage. The show could go to the Venice Biennale, he says wryly, aware of a thirst for 'provocation'. While the performed acts are consensual, there are deliberately deceitful moments when the terms change, tripping the participants up. It's a physically direct exploration of commodification and consent that uncovers the audience's desire to be tantalised – and then not only bluntly delivers it, but stamps on it, turning it into a banal financial transaction. Does its self-aware slippage between radical acts and 'cheap' tricks let it off the hook, critically? It's certainly part of Dimchev's game.



Luke Pell's *In the Ink Dark*
Photo © Jassy Earl


Art
sic
BIBLE

> **Does self-aware slippage between radical acts and 'cheap' tricks let it off the critical hook?**

P Project is followed by *Sonic Séance* by **V/DA**. A collaborative creation and performance, the performers are a mix of visual artists, choreographers, and musicians. It's a slightly unstructured yet compelling patchwork of impassioned calls, shimmering costumes, linking and swaying movements coupled with strong stances, and driving vocals. In one scene, the four performers sit in a line behind each other. With krump-like pulses and an impeccably precise kaleidoscope of limbs that pump out, it's a powerful, emphatic display of skill and conviction. While in many ways the most conventionally 'performed' piece included here, V/DA's ardent performers and dialogic ethos demands high engagement from its audience: to listen, rather than simply consume and move on.

Moving to gentler but not necessarily less considered pieces, **Luke Pell**'s *In the Ink Dark* is set in a public library, a communal place which has suffered from budget cuts under austerity in Britain. Audiences are invited to do as they wish for the hour. Garbed in dusty robes, performers move through the library with relaxed gazes and inviting smiles. Their presence is both intimate and distant: they never fully engage you, but smile as though you are both in on some secret.

Audience members perform for money in Ivo Dimchev's *P Project*



Calligraphers respond to the moving bodies by painting swirling portraits on large leaves of paper, and poems are read out. The movement feels unique to each individual, a choreography defined by personal texture and introspection rather than overt outreach or group cohesion. It is hard to know how *In the Ink Dark* would be read by those who do not see much performance: a quiet, benign world to explore, or another abstract and beautiful but impenetrable piece?

In **Ásrún Magnúsdóttir**'s *Listening Party*, there is little adult intervention. Local teenagers list their favourite songs (and why they've chosen them), and dance to the selection. Some dances have a simple group choreography, syncing up with lyrics in affirmative, jubilant gestures, while others are led by the more stage-savvy teenagers. The painful, all too recognisable dynamics of interpersonal relationships are writ large across the stage, conscious or not. For all its (apparent) lack of professional input, it is perhaps one of the strongest attempts to open up the performative space.

Take Me Somewhere's programme raises a host of questions: who goes to performance, who makes the decisions about what that performance is, and what change can artists enact? Is a radical performance always the most confrontational one, or can it be more radical to teach compassion? •

New directions home? At ImPulsTanz 2019

Lena Megyeri
10 September 2019

Reflecting on the crisis of objective in contemporary dance at Vienna's contemporary dance festival



Chris Haring's Liquid Loft company in *Stand-Alones (polyphony)*
Photo © Michael Loizenbauer

There's a scene in twin sisters Kristina and Sadé Alleyne's performance *A Night's Game* where one of the women lies face down on the floor, while the other unsuccessfully tries to grab her attention by clapping, doing athletic moves and other stunts. During my week at Vienna's ImPulsTanz, I often felt like that unresponsive sister – unable to be moved by what I experienced.

Contemporary dance's audience is small and well defined, and spectators are mostly seasoned and savvy theatre-goers. So maybe it's no wonder that I often feel like I've seen it all before. Of course, not everyone is as picky as I am, judging by the standing ovation at every one of the five shows that I watched at ImPulsTanz this year. But to me, the question still remains: where is dance trying to go?

All of the above doesn't mean that I wasn't able to enjoy or appreciate some of the productions, or elements of them. For example, **Amanda Piña** and her company **nadaproductions** would have surely kept

> **Not everyone is as picky as I am, judging by the standing ovation at every one of the five shows**

me on the edge of my seat – if I'd had a seat. Instead, I was standing in one of the exhibition rooms of Mumok (Museum of Modern Art), watching the museum version of their show *Danza y Frontera*. This year, ImPulsTanz teamed up with museums to create co-productions (yes, this has also been done quite often now, even by the Viennese festival itself). Part of nadaproductions' Endangered Human Movements series, *Danza y Frontera* is based on a dance that has its roots in an ancient pre-Hispanic dance form that was later used by the Spanish Crown to depict the conquest of Mexico. Nowadays, this dance is mixed with pop dance moves and re-enacted in border areas of Mexico plagued by violence related to narco trafficking, militarisation and cheap labour industries.

Piña's black-clad dancers create an atmosphere full of tension and threat, facing the audience with their hypnotic back-and-forth waving moves, their shoulders leaning forward, constantly alert, ready to attack. One by one or in small groups they slowly progress from the back of the room up to the audience, then disappear to put on new pieces of costumes or accessories before appearing again. As their costumes become more colourful (traditional clothes or t-shirts decorated with the Mexican flag appear), their movements open up and are spiced with elements of folk dance and street dance battles. Suddenly, Christian Müller's partially live soundscape is interrupted by a scary and loud percussion solo, accompanied by a manic group dance to finish the performance and leave the audience with a sense of shocked relief.

Another show that took place in a museum setting was *Stand-Alones (polyphony)* by one of Austria's most popular contemporary dance companies, **Liquid Loft**, founded by **Chris Haring** in 2005. Taking place in eight separately accessible, empty rooms in the Leopold Museum, *Stand-Alones* is a series of acoustically interwoven solos. In the building that exhibits some of the most important works of Vienna Modernism and has the world's biggest collection of the works of Egon Schiele, Haring and his co-creators seem to be most inspired by the latter painter's vision. In short scenes set to background noises, text fragments or music, the dancers evoke the once-scandalous Schiele with grotesque, distorted facial expressions and disfigured body postures. Movements and sounds are often repetitive and compulsive, paired with piercing, somewhat desperate looks. But compared to Schiele's paintings, Haring and his company's exploration is too direct, too obvious, and the solos are too much alike, quickly running out of new impulses to offer.

The Sea Within is Belgian choreographer **Lisbeth Gruwez**'s first creation that she doesn't dance in. Instead, she lets ten female dancers take centre stage. With loose hair and wearing simple undies and t-shirts, the women explore their own movements before building up into a group like a waving sea, demonstrating the force of nature that is female energy, to a minimalistic but atmospheric score by Maarten Van Cauwenberghe. Though a bit overlong and sometimes languid, I appreciated the high-quality dancing and choreography in this show. And yet, I felt like something was missing to make the piece really stand



Lisbeth Gruwez: *The Sea Within*
Photo © Danny Willems

out and show the power not just of women but also of dance.

Kristina and Sadé Alleyne of **Alleyne Dance**, who joined Akram Khan Company at the London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, have formally trained as athletes and were members of hip-hop companies as well. They've been running Alleyne Dance for five years now and *A Night's Game* has been on tour since 2016. This is an enigmatic piece about incarceration and fighting inner demons presented in the Alleyne sisters' athletic yet poetic body language. In Sadé's opening solo, centred around a chair, there's a lot of strength and softness, despair as well as determination, qualities that are traceable throughout the piece. And while it sometimes loses momentum and could do with a good dramaturge (particularly in clarifying the relationship between the sisters' onstage characters), *A Night's Game* has some powerful moments and shows that the Alleyne women already have a distinct choreographic style.

José Agudo in *Silk Road*
Photo © Karolina Miernik



José Agudo started his career as a flamenco dancer before moving on to contemporary dance and working with some important companies, most notably as a dancer and choreographic assistant for several of Akram Khan's shows. While working with Khan, he studied the Indian traditional dance form kathak and realised it had a lot in common with flamenco (a by now familiar connection to make). *Silk Road* is Agudo's take on the subject, in the form of two solos (one flamenco, one kathak) and a contemporary duet with Kenny Wing Tao Ho. The flamenco and kathak solos, created respectively by guest choreographers Rafael Amargo and Nahid Siddiqui, are little introductions to the two dance styles. Agudo is missing some of the sharpness and dynamism typical to the Indian dance form, but we cannot be too harsh here: just like classical ballet, this is a style you have to learn from early childhood to really master it. Agudo comes into his own during the contemporary duet. While integrating stylistic features of kathak and flamenco, he creates a fluid and pleasant body language in a kind of spiritual setting that is more of a respectful duel than a duet between two men. Musicians Bernhard Schimpelsberger and Giuliano Modarelli deserve special mention for creating the acoustic link between Spain and Asia throughout the night. And while (thanks to costume designer Kimie Nakano) they look like they've just come from an Akram Khan piece, what they create is original and unique. •

La Ribot / Dançando com a Diferença: Happy Island

Evgeny Borisenko
07 October 2019

You can see the trees on Happy Island. What about the wood?

HAU, Berlin, Germany

Direction, costumes, choreography: La Ribot / Performers: Bárbara Matos, Joana Caetano, Maria João Pereira, Sofia Marote and Pedro Alexandre Silva / Choreography assistant: Telmo Ferreira / Film director: Raquel Freire / Light design, technical direction: Cristóvão Cunha

Maria La Ribot is a daring choreographer and the bets were high when in 2018 she announced a collaboration with Dançando com a Diferença, a Portuguese company of differently abled people. Many have ventured – and slipped up – on this path before. La Ribot too, has walked on the eggshells, to an uneven result.

Greeted by a still shot of a foggy Madeira forest, we are instantly struck by a powerful solo. Maria João Pereira crosses the stage in a wheelchair to join another performer, lying immobile. She laboriously gets rid of the vehicle, pushes it away, and slowly slides to the ground. Shivering head-to-toe, she crowns herself with a rainbow headdress and draws indistinct symbols on her fellow performer's skin. This opening sequence offers the most astounding moment of the evening. Empowering and liberating. A body relieved, a free body!

Slumbery solos and group feasts follow, some over-long, others breathtaking, all led by La Ribot's curatorial music choice, dragging us from jazz piano to custom groovy beats. Slightly too present wall-sized videos by Raquel Freire feature joyous field feasts, trees-in-fog stills and hallucinatory tunnel rides – a marvel to watch, and deftly stitching together this roughly sewn show. Driven through a soothing video of a dimly lit Madeira tunnel and by a dreamy Lynchian solo dance, the show gains in hypnotising intensity but loses its message half way.



Photo © Caroline MorelFontaine

Aiming to showcase the singular body language of each performer, La Ribot seems to have left the bigger picture aside. Granting a full freedom to her performers in a garland of touching solos and you-think-it's-messy-but-it's-not group scenes, she still does not seem to unveil the final goal of the gig. An astonishing solo performer herself, La Ribot has been successfully claiming her radical 'empowerment through autonomy' approach throughout her career. *Happy Island*, though, feels like a random succession of isolated portraits that La Ribot seems more to indulgently observe than to direct.

The bottom line: A sophisticated parade of differently abled performers is enchanting, but goes no further than telling us 'look, they're great!'

Florentina Holzinger: TANZ, a sylphic reverie in stunts



Technically, *TANZ* follows all the rules of the romantic ballet: there's a wicked witch, flying fairies, magic spells and pantomime storytelling. But in Florentina Holzinger's version, the sylphides are less ghostly princesses than flesh-eating zombies. Pissing in buckets and riding flying motorbikes, the cast of eight women, aged from 20 to 80, radically challenge classical dance's fascist obsession with perfection and diaphanous beauty.

The first act focuses on training. Beatrice Cordua (the first ballerina to dance *The Rite of Spring* naked, in John Neumeier's 1972 version) instructs her disciplined students on 'how to govern their bodies' while a live camera zooms in on their naked figures to give a pornographic perspective on their flexing muscles and stretching flesh. The teacher goes from passionate pedagogue to ecstatic cult leader, feverishly scrutinising the dancers' bodies, fetishising pointed toes and pointy nipples in a scene that climaxes with a lined-up vagina inspection during which she drools over their exposed anatomy. The dancers then put on bloody pointe shoes and practise 'how to be light', until one of the sylphides is suspended by a hook in her ballet-bun, and pulled by her hair all the way to the ceiling.

The second act, following the romantic-era binary structure, veers towards the fantastic, taking us from the studio to a haunted forest. A choir of ghosts meets a big bad wolf, green lighting and copious amounts of fake blood. The live camera magnifies every gruesome detail: it fixates on Cordua's bloody crotch while she births a rat out of her pussy; later, the camera chases her around, *Blair Witch Project* style. We reach peak chimerical when the performer Lucifire's back is pierced with hooks and she's hung by her skin, breathtakingly swinging on a rope with a broom between her legs, like a hardcore pin-up witch. Or a human piñata.

In *TANZ*, beauty and gore cohabit, successfully capturing the intensity of ballet as an art form while also radically questioning its legacy, and catapulting dance into an entirely new realm.

The bottom line: Who would have thought that ballet could still be this exciting?

Claire Lefèvre
22 October 2019

Pitching witch against fairy, TANZ bares the corporal discipline and punishment of romantic ballet

Tanzquartier Wien, Vienna, Austria

Concept, performance, choreography: Florentina Holzinger / Performance by and with: Renée Copraij, Beatrice Cordua, Evelyn Frantti, Lucifire, Annina Machaz, Netti Nüganen, Suzn Pasyon, Laura Stokes, Veronica Thompson, Lydia Darling / Video: Josefin Arnell / Sound: Stefan Schneider / Light, technical director: Anne Meeussen / Stage design: Nikola Knezevic / Stage assistant: Camilla Smolders / Technical assistant: Koen Vanneste / Dramaturgy: Renée Copraij, Sara Ostertag / Management: Something Great (Berlin) & DANSCO (Amsterdam) / Coproducers: Spirit and Tanzquartier Wien, Spring Festival (Utrecht), Theatre Rotterdam, Künstlerhaus Mousonturm (Frankfurt), Arsenic (Lausanne), Münchner Kammerspiele, Take Me Somewhere Festival (Glasgow), Beursschouwburg (Brussels), deSingel (Antwerp), Sophiensaele (Berlin), Frascati Productions (Amsterdam), Theater im Pumpenhaus (Münster), asphalt Festival (Düsseldorf)

Fringe cuts from Edinburgh 2019

Lena Megyeri
29 October 2019

Patterns and patchworks during a week of dance at the Edinburgh Fringe

Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

This text was written through the NICritics programme at the 2019 Edinburgh Fringe

Even in the vast landscape of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe performances, one can find patterns and discover topics that are currently on dancemakers' minds. From tales of boyhood to Taiwanese curiosities, here's a glimpse into my week's worth of dance performances at the world's largest performing arts festival.

Redefining masculinity

It's been trending for a while: dance shows from, with and about boys or men. Whether it's a response to the slightly earlier trend of girlpower, the more recent #metoo movement, or just a natural desire to redefine masculinity in the gender-fluid twenty-first century is an open question, but Fringe delivered its own takes on the subject. **Barely Methodical Troupe**'s *Bromance* sets out to explore male camaraderie in a circus show that offers some entertaining stunts, most notably a breathtaking cyr wheel solo. But any deeper meaning fails on the tired, cheap jokes of the armpit-smelling, bum-grabbing-type.

Un Poyo Rojo by Argentina's **Nicolás Poggi** and **Luciano Rosso** (performed by Rosso with Alfonso Barón) doesn't get much further. Set in an empty locker room and involving dancing to live radio, wrestling and silly humour, the two men show off their athletic skills and mock each other constantly. But is childish really the new macho, and are we supposed to laugh at grown men making complete fools of themselves? Despite the long build-up, the homoerotic ending felt out of place and left me rather puzzled.

Norway's Boys in Sync (**Jakob Schnack Krog**, **Jay Fiskerstrand** and **Simon Zeller**) attempt to challenge modern-day boyishness and the norms of performance. There's a spark of cheekiness as the three young dancers – beautiful, tireless – face us in the fully lit events room of a church and bombard us with self-revelatory confessions, after performing some sports exercises. But the ideas never quite unfold, and the show leaves us with a sense of disorientation – which, in fact, might be an accurate impression of their young generation.

Stravinsky reinvented

Two productions were inspired by Stravinsky ballets. *The Chosen*, choreographed by **Kally Lloyd-Jones** for her Company Chordelia, references *The Rite of Spring*: here, *The Chosen* is any one of us, in the face of our own mortality. Lloyd-Jones' musings on how we choose to live with this results in 60 minutes of very artistic dying. The choreography includes lots of melodramatic staring and gasping, languishing from the mirrored cubes that form the set and are, mortifyingly, even used as a coffin.

If *The Chosen* shows how not to reinvent a classic, **Scottish Dance Theatre**'s *Ritualia* is a fine example of the opposite. It is based

on Bronislava Nijinska's Ballets Russes piece *Les Noces*, but while she uses the original score, choreographer **Colette Sadler** twists everything else around. The wedding becomes a fashion ritual with androgynous figures in black and white knit couture. They pose and vogue, as if on a runway; they are sculptural, but at the same time highly flexible and technical. Together with the lights that come in sharp colours, this show is a feast for the eyes – contemporary dance at its coolest and sexiest.

Between cultures

Not Today's Yesterday is a collaboration between British bharatanatyam dancer **Seeta Patel** and Australian choreographer **Lina Limosani**. A voiceover starts to tell a fairytale about 'faraway folk' in a magical land that is later invaded – a clear reference to colonialism, especially with fragments of politicians' speeches mixed into the text. Patel is a truly charismatic performer, able to hold our attention throughout, and the piece unfolds in a cleverly constructed set full of symbolism – like using different materials to represent the different peoples. But the choreography is didactic, and tries too hard to make its points.

Ali and Alpo is another production that is supposed to build a bridge between cultures, created by Finnish dancer **Alpo Aaltokoski** and Iraqi musician **Ali Alawad**. Two weeks before the premiere, Alawad's asylum application got rejected and he had to flee from Finland, so instead of playing live, his music is pre-recorded and he's sometimes projected onto a screen. But it's not only his absence that makes the piece almost exclusively about Aaltokoski, whose choreography is designed to highlight his soft and graceful floats and turns but doesn't have much to offer beyond these obvious aesthetic pleasures.

Bigger and smaller innovations

As one would expect, many of Fringe's dance shows experiment with style, form or body language. There's even a project called Innovations Contemporary Dance Platform that showcases young choreographers' works with two different line-ups. Although I only got to see 'Programme A', this platform, in its current form, doesn't seem to live up to its name.

Extremely Pedestrian Chorales, on the contrary, is an ambitious project that shows that it is literally possible to translate music into movement. By combining notations of the movement of pedestrians with Bach's Chorales into a visual score, collaborators **Karl Jay Lewin** and **Matteo Fargion** create a work for four dancers that is clever, instructive (they show us the score itself) and entertaining – if probably more fun to dance than to watch.

Have you ever seen a dance show that you really hated? Imagine being invited to its rehearsal and being allowed to laugh, and you get *From the Top* by **Victor Fung Dance** from Hong Kong. It's another piece with voiceover: we hear rather nonsensical rehearsal instructions from an invisible choreographer while the dancers' (often hilarious) thoughts and reflections are 'subtitled' on a screen. *From the Top* makes fun of the often absurd nature of so-called



Scottish Dance Theatre in Colette Sadler's *Ritualia*, a cool, sexy take on Stravinsky's *Les Noces*
Photo © Brian Hartley

artistic integrity, but never takes itself too seriously.

Recirquel is Hungary's most successful contemporary circus group that aims to stand out not just with incredible acrobatics but with more dance-based choreography, creating the genre of 'cirque danse'. *My Land* offers just that. It's professional and often takes your breath away, but it lacks playfulness and uniqueness – except for a virtuoso duet between a man and a ladder, which steals the show and wins the audience's heart.

Made in Taiwan

For the sixth year in a row, Edinburgh Fringe presented a Taiwan season. With only four shows on the programme, it was still a diverse and exciting selection. **Shinehouse Theatre**'s *Fish* is a simple tale of a young boy and his grandfather with a nice moral (even when it's hard to show our love, we have to try). The piece is aimed at hearing-impaired audiences, and while it's supposed to be enjoyable to any spectator, it's simply too busy with puppetry, sign language, spoken text and subtitles to be followed all at once.

Monster, produced by **Dua Shin Te Production**, seems to aim for something meaningful and experimental, but for the most part the piece is anything but original. Described by choreographer-performer **Yen-Chen Liu** as a psychedelic fantasy, it is randomly filled with strobe lights, lots of smoke, pseudo-philosophical contemplations on time, and mildly witty meta-messages displayed on a screen



Po-Cheng Tsai's B.Dance company in *Floating Flowers*
Photo @ Chou Mo

or heard from a speaker. There's also a little nudity thrown in for good measure. These many ingredients do not add up to a coherent and engaging piece.

Chang Dance Theatre's *Bout* is another in the line of shows that dig into male bonding, but this one gets a special layer, as the three performers are all brothers. The intricate choreography draws on wrestling, everyday movements and contemporary techniques to show that while men are often expected to have a certain outward image, they can always pause and lean on each other for support. A beautiful exploration of the importance of brotherhood in a hectic modern world.

Floating Flowers, choreographed by **Po-Cheng Tsai** and performed by his company **B.Dance**'s fantastic cast, is inspired by a traditional Buddhist ceremony of floating lanterns on water to send away bad luck and bring happiness. Since his father's death, Tsai had lost faith in this favourite ritual of his childhood, but was inspired to create this piece to honour his father and cope with his grief. This background story explains the visual beauty and emotional whirlwind of *Floating Flowers*; that it never becomes sentimental or kitschy is a proof of Tsai's sense of balance. Dressed in white – and indeed, playfully floating – muslin, the dancers speed through the wicked, mad and steadily surprising choreography with incredible control and precision, never losing their perfect unison.
A performance of meticulous structure and endless choreographic imagination, it's a gem in the Fringe programme.

Hodworks & Unusual Symptoms: Coexist

Lena Megyeri
24 November 2019

Fearless performers brace themselves in a questing, questioning work by Hodworks and Theater Bremen

Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, Budapest, Hungary

Choreography: Adrienn Hód / Artistic collaboration: Csaba Molnár / Costume & Stage Design: Anna Lena Grote / Music: Ábris Gryllus / Dramaturgy: Gregor Runge / Assistance: Andy Zondag / Artistic Consultation: Ármin Szabó-Székely / Production Management: Alexandra Morales, Ágnes Básthy / By & with: Aaron Samuel Davis, Gabrio Gabrielli, Nóra Horváth, Alexandra Llorens, Csaba Molnár, Nora Ronge, Andor Rusu, Jessica Simet, Young-Won Song, Antonio Stella / Produced by: Theater Bremen, Hodworks / Supported by: Goethe-Institut (International Coproduction Fund), Conrad Naber Stiftung, Workshop Foundation / Coproduced by: Trafó House of Contemporary Arts

There has been a certain structural pattern in Hodworks' latest productions: *Sunday*, *Mirage* and now *Coexist* all open with a longer, heavily text-based (or at least vocal) introductory part before turning into a dance extravaganza. It looks like the performers need a lot of time to brace themselves before they can actually start dancing. Of course, the inspirations behind each piece vary, but they are never short of absurdity.

A collaboration between Hodworks and Bremen-based dance company Unusual Symptoms, *Coexist* plays with spectators' expectations towards contemporary dance – not for the first time in choreographer Adrienn Hód's oeuvre. In the first part, the dancers perform short, numbered solos (often with different degrees of nudity), dedicating each one to someone or something when they finish. These dedications either strengthen or reinterpret our first impression of the scenes. For example, a female dancer's naked solo with a cowbell on her neck gets a new meaning by being dedicated to her children. Another nude scene, with the body mostly covered up by a suitcase, is dedicated to censorship, which just adds to the sarcastic effect. There are dedications to penguins, Rudolf Laban, our ancestors, tradition, a dancer's father, people who like nudity, and many more.

Slowly, the solos turn into a commotion where the performers act like robotic dolls and organise each other into obscene statues while someone recalls questionable



Photo © Jörg Landsberg

choreographic methods from the rehearsals (another of Hód's recurrent self-reflective motifs). Finally, the 'actual dancing' starts – and while it's technical and well choreographed, it's clearly not meant merely for aesthetic pleasure. Rather, it's a bit uncanny, especially in pairing with Ábris Gryllus' haunting score, based on constantly repeated words like 'intimidate', 'forgive me' or 'calm down'.

Both Hodworks' and Unusual Symptoms' dancers are fearless and fiery performers in this piece, but two of the choreographer's permanent co-creators stand out: Jessica Simet with her gut-wrenching emotional transformations, and Csaba Molnár with his vicious sense for acting and comedy.

The bottom line: Adrienn Hód continues to investigate the unpleasant and unnerving sides of being a contemporary dancer – or their spectator

Jann Gallois: Samsara

Charles A Catherine
10 December 2019

All rise: choreographer, curtains, dancers and spirit ascend in a piece about worldly bondage and higher powers

Théâtre National de Chaillot, Paris, France

Rising French star Jann Gallois always chooses simplicity of scenery and complexity of intention, so the dancers themselves become the main vehicle for her message. The curtain rises on her latest work *Samsara* to show a white stage, a bunch of dancers facing you in a circle of light, a thick black rope reeled around their waists, arms, necks, attaching them all together. The ensemble moves in one direction, then another: they're a community, no doubt about the metaphor. The moves are clear and clean, betraying the hip-hop influence of Gallois' background; but the faces are blank and tired.

> **Is Samsara a political work? Not only. As time goes by, spirituality arises.**

As individualities begin to rise, they gradually unwind the rope, getting more space – and trouble: can the community deal with individual moves? A little story of power and freedom starts, of mastery and bondage, puppets and players: ropes definitely make sense. Every move is danced, every body is more and more spirited, using the ropes to fulfil a purpose, or to defy their coercive power. Harassment, sexual domination and rejection, manipulation – nothing's missing. Is *Samsara* a political work? Not only.

As time goes by, spirituality arises. 'Samsara' is the Sanskrit concept of existence – the cycle of life, death and rebirth from which the questing spirit seeks escape. The connection between the dancers becomes less horizontal, more vertical. Exhaustion in their domination games leads to lighter moves, but also to falls. Once all fallen, the lighting rig descends from the flies like some electric eye of God. A man in black attaches the ropes to it, and as the eye ascends again a new ballet begins, made of suspensions, reciprocal supports and soft attempts to dissolve the aerial human cluster that has formed. The air becomes foggy, backlit. These humans might be doomed, or saved from their destiny.

The scene is impressive, fascinating. How did it happen? The dancers went from collective enslavement to individual revelations, to collective empowerment; but always led by some higher force. You choose which one. •

The bottom line: A high-level work that rises to its own physical and spiritual challenges

Choreography, scenography: Jann Gallois / Consultant scenography: Delphine Sainte-Marie / Lighting: Cyril Mulon / Music: Charles Amblard / Costume: Marie-Cécile Viault / Outside eye: Frédéric Le Van / With: Inkeun Baïk, Carla Diego, Shirwann Jeammes, Jean-Charles Jousni, Marie Hanna Klemm, Jérémy Kouyoumdjian, Laureline Richard

Mårten Spångberg: 46

Yasen Vasilev
13 December 2019

The 'post-dance' advocate performs a solo – hashtagged #lonelyformalism – that reassembles past work

Volksroom, Brussels, Belgium

With and by: Mårten Spångberg / Rehearsal director: Sidney Barnes / AI and programming: Heiko Göltzer

The material in 46 was developed by the performers in Mårten Spångberg's later work from *The Internet to Culture*. Thanks to Tamara Alegre, Simon Asencio, Sidney Barnes, Liza Baliasnaja, Linda Blomqvist, Renée Copraij, Emma Daniel, Christine De Smedt, Misha Downey, Mette Edvardsen, Hana Lee Erdman, Adriano Wilfert Jensen, Sandra Lolax, Mark Lorimer, Sarah Ludi, Moya Michael, Clinton Stringer, Louise Dahl, Rebecka Stillman, Hanna Strandberg, Else Tunemyr, Alexandra Tveit

Fifteen years ago Swedish choreographer Mårten Spångberg created a solo based on reconstructed material from Steve Paxton's improvisations on *The Goldberg Variations*. In his new solo *46*, usually performed in open or public spaces, he reconstructs his own work. Part embodiment of the past, part exorcism of it, *46* incorporates bits and pieces of material produced and performed by his dancers over the years – a farewell to his own creative history, a manifestation of his theories and/or a way out of the dead-end street of style and its repetition.

Wearing hat and t-shirt branded '46' (a direct if cryptic reference to motorbike racer Valentino Rossi), with glasses he often readjusts, greying hair and a piece of paper with the score in hand, Spångberg looks vulnerable – and at the same time grand, and is obviously fully aware of this. The delivery of his minimal material is far from precise, and sometimes intentionally clumsy – limbs extended into plain diagonals, torso inclined or curved, occasional glances towards the audience who sit dangerously close on blankets on the floor of Volksroom in Brussels.

Yet respect for the material, dedication to form and lack of self-indulgence let the dance be experienced, in the words of Susan Sontag, 'against interpretation', while also creating an empathic relation with the performer. Repetitive, circular, with no dramatic arc, these meditational 45 minutes of #lonelyformalism (as he calls it on Instagram) could easily become a durational experience, exploring ways to be together in time and space. Spångberg says he wants his dance to be observed as we observe a tree: always there, yet constantly changing, neither (re)presenting anything, nor aiming to impress. It's not there to create, extract or exchange value, but exists uninscribed, allowing time and space for (self-)reflection.

I had started my day with Laurie Anderson's advice for the young where she says she chose art to be free. Last night in Volksroom I saw Spångberg is free, and his refreshing uncompromising work makes a lot of sense in our times. •

The bottom line: Part recap, part divestment from the past, *46* opens time and space for our reflection

> It's not there to create, extract or exchange value

On and off the platform: dunaPart5, Hungary



Anna Biczók, *Precedents to a potential future*
Photo © Katarzina Chmura

Lena Megyeri
23 January 2020

New voices at the Hungarian platform for performing arts – and new battles over state support and control



Organised biennially by Trafó House of Contemporary Arts, dunaPart – Platform in Hungary is a showcase aiming to present the most interesting productions and initiatives from the independent theatre and dance field in Hungary. At the end of November 2019, around 30 performances were presented over four days to an international audience of producers, reviewers and other theatre professionals. The programme was curated by theatre and dance critics and other professionals in the scene. From the colourful dance programme that included works by established artists as well as newcomers, I picked out four performances by young artists worth keeping an eye on.

Jenna Jalonen and **Nóra Horváth** brought a breath of fresh air to Budapest's dance scene by organising the *[D]OPEN your move* festival, aiming to build bridges between contemporary and urban dance cultures during a day filled with performances, dance battles and a party. With their own company **Collective Dope**, the two creator-performers pursued similar goals: to collaborate with artists from different backgrounds and art forms, and to search for new ways of movement and performance that are easily accessible for younger audiences as well.

The first work of their '*I just wish to…*' trilogy – *DOPE I just wish to help you* – explores the relationship between active and passive bodies and raw physicality. It starts with the two women standing face-to-face with tense looks in their eyes. Suddenly, Jalonen drops to the floor, and Horváth rushes to help her back to her feet. This pattern repeats several times, while Jalonen throws herself more and more aggressively, with a clear intention to self-harm. Horváth doesn't lose patience, and even tries to prevent her from falling; but through Jalonen's resistance their duet slowly becomes like a wrestling contest. The self-harming tendencies get even stronger with the appearance of a bottle of rosé wine and a bag of white powder, which Horváth uses to make a snow angel. Their wrestling is stylised and very real at the same time, and a little scary as some (fake) blood trickles from Jalonen's mouth towards the end. Is it possible to help someone without getting ourselves into trouble? The duet ends on an optimistic note: the two women stand in an embrace that provides a moment of stillness and safety.

Horváth's other duet in the programme, *Beat*, easily merges styles from urban to Hungarian folk dance, from contemporary to twerking, in a simple narrative of 'girl and boy meet in the disco and dance the night away'. The stylistic freedom and versatility is tamed by the rigorous structures of time and space, choreographed to the irresistible flow of Áron Porteleki's musical score. It's a duet for sure, and **Gábor Ivanov** was a wonderful and tireless partner throughout these intense 40 minutes; but it's Horváth's show after all, and her energy and youthful joy in dancing was completely contagious. No wonder she swept critics off their feet, and won the 2018 Rudolf Laban award for best contemporary dance work in Hungary.

Anna Biczók defines *Precedents to a potential future* as a lecture performance – but this is as much a play with viewers' expectations as anything else in the piece. Sitting on the stage behind a table, she

starts by talking about a performance where a female dancer sits on the stage behind a table. Stories in stories unfold like parts of a Matryoshka doll, and Biczók twists and turns around the text so often that we almost lose track. But that is intentional: she wants us to use our minds – she even lets the lights switch off on one occasion, to trigger our imagination – while she also provides some 'background dancing'. She is a confident performer who can capture her audience's attention, which makes up for the slight unevenness of the piece.

'What do you like about your body?' **Lili Stern** asks some members of the audience at the beginning of her solo *Loop Pool*. Their looped answers will be replayed at the end; but until then, we go through a haunting and unnerving experience. Through compulsive, repetitive movements and some simple elements of scenery (a nylon curtain, flesh-coloured underwear), she creates a suffocating atmosphere that tells about how uncomfortable it can be in a body exposed to constant observation and unrealistic expectations – whether from society or from oneself. Stern's biggest achievement here is to create a visceral experience: *Loop Pool*'s effects unfold much more on a sensorial than on an intellectual level.

Below: Nora Horváth's *Beat*, with Horváth and Gábor Ivanov
Below right: Lili Stern, *Loop Pool*.
Photo © Jokuti Gyorgy







Budapest Átrium Theatre, 8 December 2019: spectators raise hands in protest against the proposed culture bill, on the occasion of the 75th performance of Ferenc Molnár's play *One, Two, Three*. Photo © Péter Lakatos

Post-dunaPart

If dunaPart shone a light on Hungary's independent performing arts scene, it was shadowed only a couple of days later by the leak of a parliamentary bill proposing major restructuring to state funding of the arts. The three most worrying points were: the planned abolition of the National Cultural Fund, one of the most important sources of state funding to the arts through regular open calls; a new power given to the government minister of human resources to appoint the directors of city theatres in Budapest; and axing all operational funding for independent companies. It was also reported that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was planning to pass the bill in an accelerated process, in only a couple of days' time, without any negotiation with members of the scene.

Independent and private theatres had already been operating under considerable financial insecurity following funding restructures at the end of 2018, and reaction to the leak was swift. A public petition urging the lawmakers to reject the bill was signed by more than 50,000 people. A protest, attended by thousands, was organised where performers, theatre directors and Budapest's new liberal mayor, Gergely Karácsony, spoke against the proposal, pointing out that it threatened the operation and independence of theatres. Leading actors spoke out in a video that was spread through Facebook. And many theatres asked their audiences for solidarity, taking photos with spectators after each performance.

As a result, the bill passed in a somewhat softened version. For now, the National Cultural Fund continues to exist (although its future remains uncertain). Previously administered by their local municipality, Budapest city theatres will now have to sign a deal between the municipality and the minister of human resources, who will jointly define their terms of operation, including the appointment of the theatre director. And the government insists that the operational funding of independent companies will be assured.

Even so, due to some vague wording and many unanswered questions, the situation remains far from secure or transparent, and many theatres continue to operate in uncertainty. Reducing a severe threat to a lesser one is in any case more a defence against encroachment than a victory in itself. The next edition of dunaPart may show a very different face. •

KDV Dance Ensemble: Las Casas Invisibles

A new company are the first contemporary dance show to headline at Berlin's iconic electronic music venue Funkhaus

As a cast of ten dancers in ripped, blood-red catsuits descend into the darkened, misty arena of Funkhaus' main hall, hopes are high for the inaugural performance of the newly formed KDV Dance Ensemble, spearheaded by Puerto Rican choreographer Kianí del Valle. As the first contemporary dance show to headline the iconic Berlin electronic music venue – located in a former GDR radio station – and with music by renowned artists Floating Points, Loctic and Raven, *Las Casas Invisibles* set itself up to be a unique event in Berlin's cultural landscape, marrying the city's rich worlds of modern dance and club culture.

Loosely described as an exploration of 'constant migration' and 'the feeling of never arriving', *Las Casas Invisibles* has little connecting thread aside from its continual display of intense emotional trauma. Desperate reaches, repetitive pulses and phalanxes of dancers performing jolting movements in unison – as well as an out-of-place duet of dancers giggling maniacally while performing movements reminiscent of childhood clapping games and hopscotch – feel like clichéd attempts at presenting extreme emotion, and come off as inauthentic.

Del Valle does, however, come into her own in her inventive use of space. Presumably influenced by her background choreographing for galleries and museums (she has presented work in the Serpentine and the Barbican in London as well as Copenhagen Contemporary), she makes the most of every nook and cranny. Throughout, dancers traverse different levels of the wooden amphitheatre, squeeze themselves through audience members, and adopt seductive poses in alcoves.

Other impressive moments include a standout solo by Alvin Collantes. Intricately articulating his body, he flings his limbs at irregular intervals so that they pierce the air in time to the light-saber-like swipes in the music. However, on the whole, the cast's aggressive shakes, crashes to the floor and histrionic screams married with distressed facial expressions, verge on torture porn. It leads me to question: why are so many contemporary dance shows obsessed with showcasing bodies in pain?

The bottom line: A melodramatic production presenting suffering for the sake of it

Emily May
13 February 2020

Funkhaus, Berlin, Germany

Photo © Jubal Battisti

Choreography, direction: Kiani del Valle / Music: Raven, Floating Points, Lotic / Assistant choreographer: Jacob Yaw / Dancers: Sebastian Abarbanell, Marcus Louend, Alvin Collantes, Thomas Rohe, Annalise Van Even, Shannon Leypoldt, Ruben Nsue, Sofia Ndaba, Ya-Chin Tsai, Maya Gomez / Lighting: Michael Titze / Rehearsal director: Amit Preisman / Studio manager: Elizabeth Hinojos / Stylist: Olive Duran / Assistant stylist: Fanny Kuebler / Makeup: Servullo Mendez/ Hair: Fatima, Kosuke Ikeuchi / Produced by: Box Artist Management

Daniel Linehan: sspeciess

Marie Pons
24 February 2020

Exploring co-existence and 'becoming-with', Daniel Linehan's new group piece radiates radical softness

DeSingel, Antwerp, Belgium

Concept, choreography: Daniel Linehan / Creation, interpretation: Gorka Gurrutxaga Arruti, Anneleen Keppens, Daniel Linehan, Victor Pérez Armero, Louise Tanoto / Dramaturgy: Alain Franco / Artistic assistant: Michael Helland / Scenography: 88888 / Costumes: Frédéric Denis / Light design: Gregory Rivoux / Sound: Michael Schmid, Raphaël Hénard / Textile: Impressions Collectif MECC / Production: Hiatus (Brussels, BE) / Coproduction: deSingel International Arts Campus (Antwerp, BE), Centre chorégraphique national d'Orléans (FR) and Perpodium (Antwerp, BE) / International tour planning: Damien Valette (Paris, FR)



The light reveals a set design that resembles a minimalist building site: pieces of fabric, construction cones, a crumpled silver space blanket, a pile of books, a tall metallic structure, pieces of wood. The five performers of Daniel Linehan's new *sspeciess* walk towards us with smiling faces and kind looks, immediately opening an empathetic channel between them and the audience.

Each performer grabs a cone and climbs up in the rows. The light turns off and the dancers blow gently into their cones; the sound of wind rises, a stereo version of a first breath. Interconnection and coexistence between elements – human bodies, air, light, natural and manmade objects – draw the focus. Precise choreographic choices put this sense of connection in action. The dancers are individuals, spinning around like autonomous satellites, yet each one is part of the same moving web; the effect of each movement ripples out.

Our attention is also invited to shift between different scales. A seated Louise Tanoto tells a story that starts in the sky before coming to earth, depicting with fluidity an expansive, open environment. The dancers' bodies share this same quality: gliding, with light arms floating at their sides, or engaged in soft twists, then blending into an amassed magma where the five of them are entangled while progressing on the floor.

Small actions become small, playful games, but never feel naive or sugar-coated, as Linehan weaves them with a subtle delicacy, recalling the intense focus of children. *sspeciess* evokes deep ecology, a branch of environmental philosophy that considers the world as a web of coexistent ecosystems. This is most acute in a beautiful sequence where each performer names a being to protect, to be attentive to: the orca whales, the Siberian Tiger, mycelium, my nephew.

Such a porous conjunction of materials anchors our imagination in a complex universe, reflecting both our present and our future, where the sixth mass extinction coexists with Extinction Rebellion. sspeciess shares small rhizomatic pieces of hope, opening up from the stage a sense of 'becoming-with', as Donna Haraway would put it, and questioning our being in a powerful and yet radically soft way.

The bottom line: A subtle choreography weaving together agitation and empathy

Crystal Pite Jonathon Young Revisor

A farce in the fog of post-truth, Crystal Pite and Jonathon Young's Revisor trails a string of questions

Suzanne Frost
12 March 2020

Somewhere between absurd Dadaism and operetta silliness, the Russian playwright Nikolai Gogol has a sharp talent for exposing the uglier underbelly of society just as you were laughing out loud. His *Inspector General* (sometimes known as *The Revisor*) is a comedy about a low-level clerk, mistaken for a high-office inspector, being wined, dined and bribed by a collective of corrupt characters, eager to cover up their dirt and backstab where needed to hold on to their little pockets of power.

Enter Crystal Pite and her co-creator/writer Jonathon Young. With her command of bodies and his lust for language, plus their company of extraordinarily nimble dancers, they populate the stage with a hugely entertaining collection of whimsical oddballs who could be straight out of a Wes Anderson film. Riding the rhythms of language like music, bodies contort with anxiety, suspicion or greed, faces twist and grimace, lip-syncing to the external voices of a pre-recorded script in a perfect layer of grotesque theatrical alienation. The symbiosis of body and voice, precise to the nail, is astonishing to watch. Brechtian tropes aplenty are thrown onto the stage, as a disembodied voice, like the voice of god, reads out stage directions.



Rena Narumi and Jermaine Spivey in *Revisor*
Photo © Michael Slobodian

Then, a break. Rewinding the narrative, Pite and Young revisit, repeat and deconstruct previous scenes, loop phrases of text and movement, lose the characters' costuming (Pite loves a grey t-shirt) to reveal their craft as the ghostly voice talks us through choreographic choices: 'This is my doing. I have given shape to this.' Is the voice the director herself? Or the actual revisor? In a fog of post-truth and post-dramatic abstraction, the initial narrative of the farce is lost, disassembled into its smallest atoms.

Once the cogs and bolts behind the work have been revealed, it is difficult to reconnect with the original returning characters. They are changed, and maybe so are we.

Is there a moral to this story? What does it all mean? Did I get it? As intriguing as it is confusing, this is challenging, complex theatre that leaves you with a ?

The bottom line: A joyful farce fuses theatre and dance to near perfection – before descending into complex abstraction, from which it is hard to recover

Sadler's Wells Theatre, London, United Kingdom

Written by: Jonathon Young / Choreographed & directed by: Crystal Pite / Composition & sound design: Owen Belton, Alessandro Juliani, Meg Roe / Scenic design & reflective light concept: Jay Gower Taylor / Lighting design: Tom Visser / Costume design: Nancy Bryant / Assistant to the creators: Eric Beauchesne / Co-produced by: Sadler's Wells (UK), Théâtre de la Ville/La Villette (FR), Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (CA), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (US), Canadian Stage (CA), Seattle Theatre Group (US), The Hamber Foundation (CA)



New Choreographers Festival Athens

Anastasio Koukoutas
Betina Panagiotara
Sanjoy Roy
31 March 2020

A Springback spinoff at the seventh New Choreographers Festival in Athens

In the heart of the economic crisis in Greece, in 2013, when everyone marvelled at the cultural-creative inventiveness in the face of harshening of sociopolitical conditions, Stegi-Onassis Foundation took the initiative to support young choreographers and create a showcase which would function as a springboard for upcoming and promising dance creators. Seven years later, the initial questions around the productivity of the 'young' and the future of the Greek dance scene remain valid – given that for years subsidies or any kind of financial support from the state were cut, leading to what for many seemed, paradoxically, a 'proliferation of ideas'. Dancers/choreographers who were exposed to the dead-end of economic stagnation, found in this institutional framework a way to preserve hope and experiment with their own craft.

The choreographers who are selected to participate in this densely organised two-day festival don't fit easily distinguishable criteria. Some are experienced dancers who attempt to choreograph for the first time. Others, already wearing the choreographer's hat, search for ways to become more institutionally recognised: the Festival often works as an opening to further visibility, working opportunities and financial support.



Anastasia Valsamaki, *DisJoint*
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos

Despite the vagueness of ‘young’ or ‘upcoming’ and any limitations applied to the label ‘Greek’, the Festival has retained the ‘casualness’ of an open studio presentation, where the dance community gathers and explores or maybe seeks to question trends, find new references, accustom itself to the widening spectrum of choreography and dance. However, it is evident that sometimes in the process of ‘talent scouting’, the battle between institutions to name the ‘next big thing’ in the art business works against the very core idea behind the processual dissemination of practices that need time to flourish and evolve properly.

For this seventh edition, an open call for dance-writers was held, taking the whole initiative a step further: how do we talk about dance and how writing about/with dance can help acquaint ourselves with the particularities of the local scene and the ever-expanding horizon of dance experimentation. The writing programme was led by our Athens-based Springback contributors Anastasio Koukoutas and Betina Panagiotara, and by editor Sanjoy Roy; the following are their reviews of five selected works from the eight presented at the New Choreographers Festival.

Anastasio Koukoutas

State support was cut, leading to what for many seemed, paradoxically, a ‘proliferation of ideas’



Zeppelin Bend
Katerina Andreou

Herself as Another

Claiming her own uncompromising stage vocabulary, Katerina Andreou ventures to her first take on a dance duet. *Zeppelin Bend* is imbued with ambiguity referring to both space – a playground or maybe a fitness bootcamp – and the very relationship between two female performers. Dressed in identical outfits – as if teammates in a sports squad – the two play constantly with the indistinct limits that lie between them; each of them seems in dialogue with the other half of herself. However, despite their seeming resemblance, this game of replication is not aimed at identifying/simulating one with the other – thus, making us perceive them as one – but rather at a comparison that complexifies their simultaneous actions.

> Each seems in dialogue with the other half of herself

In this type of coexistence, emphasised either through wrestling grips of the Greco-Roman style or by means of jumpstyle movement that draws from techno culture, the 'competitive other' is not just an excuse to duplicate actions, but to explore potential limits of freedom in shared body practices and techniques (sport, dance and so on). Movement material isn't consistent; on the contrary, like the platforms or islets on stage, movement variations underline spatial and temporal inconsistencies as the foundation for new ways of inhabiting the stage. Suspension from the ropes, or head-banging to music of Pink Floyd serve as a reminder of the obsessive ways in which children occupy themselves with play, their unanticipated pleasure in and



Katerina Andreou: *Zeppelin Bend*
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos

attachment to actions to which they give themselves with every fibre of their beings. While dance craft in *Zeppelin Bend* might at times seem 'unnatural' – the sing-song of birds, or the layer of smoke that shrouds the entire stage at some point heightens further this impression – this is only because it indicates an 'outside' or 'elsewhere', countering our experience of the stage with an unfamiliar lightness. Such versatility doesn't only encompass the relationship between the two performers but also gives a differing meaning to it, constantly stepping beyond the horizon of the expected.

Anastasio Koukoutas

DisJoint
Anastasia Valsamaki

Register the elements: a piano fugue resounding around an empty stage, its perimeters demarcated by floor-level strip lights; the back one, lit. For Anastasia Valsamaki's *DisJoint* is a piece that plays with elements: sounds, light, space, colours. And, of course, the dancers – Gavriela Antonopoulou, Nefeli Asteriou and Tasos Karachandis – with their steppy phrases, made of folds, hinges, lunges, tilts and quivers. Everything is as articulated as that fugue.

The piece unfolds as a sequence of separate episodes, each with its own lighting and colour – the strip lights flush from warm orange to midnight blue – and its own sound, whether the crackling of a distance recording (a scratchy, gappy repeat of that first fugue), or the dry grate of pebbles. In each episode, implicit cues between the dancers spark flurries of action and interaction. After a while, you notice that while the poetics change – here, it's all about fleetness; there, it's about touch and weight; elsewhere, it's about interweaving – many of the same elements recur, like words used in different sentences.

Like several pieces on the programme, *DisJoint* feels unfinished, still in its creation rather than its refining phase. But it holds much promise: it's fascinating to watch, always clean, considered and – I'll say it again – articulate.

Sanjoy Roy

Becoming with Animal
Iro Vasalou

Riveting and atmospheric, the work *Becoming with Animal* seems to have sprung from the writings of Haruki Murakami. From the very start, it constructs a state of dark realism where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary, the human and the bestial, are blurred. Choreographer Iro Vasalou is a compelling performer in this solo piece that brings a woman's transformation into an animal to the stage, tracing its various phases. But is it a transformation? Or is it a dive into existing animal instincts? Alone, set inside a circle of spectators, she manages to create an agonising atmosphere that begins with a ritual act, moves on to her taking the place of becoming a hunter, inviting audience members to take part in her experiment, and ends with her returning to the here and now, as if she has just extricated herself from ecstasy, empowered and transformed.

Is it a transformation? Or a dive into existing animal instincts?



Iro Vasalou, *Becoming with Animal*
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos

It is a powerful solo in which the performer experiments with her body in an exploration of identities that cast doubt on social norms. Its bestial energy, repetitive nature and physically exhausting demands highlight not only the gruelling process that is transformation, but also the difficulties that every change entails.

Betina Panagiotara

Vanishing Point

Dafin Antoniadou, Alexandros Vardaxoglou

Point of No Return

Two bodies in a suffocating embrace. The blaring music at times accentuates the pair's desire to peel off from one another, and at others creates an agonising pause – almost as if the loosening of this corporeal knot would surrender these two bodies to complete stillness. In *Vanishing Point*, symbolism and references drawn from something otherworldly truly fuel and shape the performance's material: whether they are fallen from some nightmarish future, or forgotten beings of a distant past is of no real import. The pair cling to one another as if the body of the other were the last plank of salvation. Inescapably, this duet – which cannot in fact be considered a duet in typical choreographic terms – is expressively charged with outbursts, micro-movements that maximise both muscle tone and an undertow of physical violence, indicative of that ambiguous struggle to which the two performers have submitted themselves on an equal footing. And there really is no victor here; any victory is signified by their desire to remain conjoined, so that even when these bodies 'come off the rails', swept up in a chaotic maelstrom of movements, their contact continues to delineate the bare minimum of space, until it is transubstantiated into another form of life.



Dafin Antoniadou, Alexandros Vardaxoglou: *Vanishing Point*
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos

Dafin Antoniadou and Alexandros Vardaxoglou present a duet of high physical intensity. Their first joint attempt at choreography is characterised by experimentations with familiar movement materials, judging at least by the fact that both remain active as contemporary dancers. The music in the main accompanies the piece organically, colouring the action with cognate tones, and there's no lack of moments that go a step beyond to create a more cinematically tinged and imposing atmosphere. The costumes – an indirect reference to Léon Bakst? – complete the aesthetic whole, accentuating the alluring plasticity of the bodies. It's unfortunate that a lack of stage depth forces the action into the foreground, when one is left with the dominant impression that a little distance and perspective are essential for ensuring the aesthetic coherence of all the elements into a cohesive whole.

Anastasio Koukoutas

Have you ever been felled by a flatpack?

Inspired by Springback Academy, the writers' programme at the 2020 New Choreographers Festival was hosted by Onassis Stegi, with twelve participants mentored by Anastasio Koukoutas, Betina Panagiotara and Sanjoy Roy. To see all their reviews on all eight works at the Festival, visit the link below and scroll down to 'New texts on dance': **www.onassis.org/whats-on/onassis-new-choreographers-festival-7**



‘manoeuvre’
Candy Karra, Chara Kotsali

Have you ever been felled by a flatpack? Lying corpsed beneath a plank of wood, almost as if it were a coffin lid, Candy Karra and Chara Kotsali appear to have been there, and done that.

The remainder of this sparse piece – for two bodies, one plank and the occasional thud or crackle of sound – plays out almost like a replay of the moves that might have brought them to this impassive juncture. With faces either hidden or determinedly blank, Karra and Kotsali variously slide, place, carry and rotate the plank.

The work pivots on an understated ambiguity. On one side, the women – arms folding, hands gripping, spines leaning, feet anchoring – are parts of a material, mechanical world. On the other, the plank comes closer to a human world in which the women, in their studiously neutral way, variously try it out as seesaw, lever, compass or climbing frame.

Mostly, you watch the moves without being moved by them, but there are glimpses of more poetic significance. Using the plank as a ladder to reach upwards, for example, as if towards some higher purpose. Or the closing scene, the plank repeatedly toppling only for the women to set it upright again – counterbalancing the work’s static, deadpan opening with a Sisyphean image of life, continuing.

Sanjoy Roy

Candy Karra, Chara Kotsali: ‘manoeuvre’
Photo © Andreas Simopoulos

SCENE ON SCREEN



La Joie de Vivre

Ka Bradley
15 April 2019

Wedged between independence and genocide, a Cambodian dance scene shows that loving life is precious – and takes practice

https://youtu.be/1w_rXirCTK4





The 1960s and early 1970s were a golden age for Cambodia's film and music, a brief crackle of coruscating culture wedged between the 1953 declaration of independence from France and the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime of 1975–79. Spearheading the film industry was the king, Norodom Sihanouk, who made more than fifty films. One of his bubbly standouts was 1969's *La Joie de Vivre*.

The film stars Saksi Sbong as Princess Sulpha, the determinedly hedonistic (and adulterous) wife of Prince Chantavong. The prince owns an illegal gambling den disguised as an orchid shop; the princess is having an affair with her nephew.

Sihanouk wanted his film to appear modern and daring, which meant two things: sex appeal and rock'n'roll. *La Joie de Vivre* included musical numbers from some of Cambodia's popular musicians and singers (catch Pan Ron in the climactic shoot-out scene in a silver minidress), and the dance scenes abandoned the traditional social dances of *romvong* and *saravann* in favour of hip-swinging couple duets. Like the more formal style of Khmer classical dance, both *romvong* and *saravann* are characterised by graceful postures, decorous gestures of hands and wrists, and carefully placed steps. Neither the classical nor the social dances lend themselves to racy hip-swinging.

Cambodia's independence brought about an era of liberalisation in the form of Westernisation for the urban bourgeoisie. *Sampot* skirts were swapped for the latest Parisian fashions; American music inspired the first generation of pop singers. *La Joie de Vivre* was filmed and produced at the height of this cultural shift, and it captures Cambodia's wealthy middle

class experimenting with their hybrid post-colonial culture, tragically wiped out before they'd had a chance to make it their own.

Early on in the film, Sulpha sneaks out to a restaurant to meet her lover. She's the height of sophistication, with her foxy black bob, her scandalous red top and her printed flares. She and her toyboy nephew hit the dancefloor, watched enviously by the wife of the local governor.

The band, overcome with the music, writhe and bop like people possessed. Sulpha and her nephew immerse themselves in the rollicking tunes, but a lifetime of *romvong* has wrapped a rope around their wriggle. Firmly held carriages, still and heavy hips, an expressive energy concentrated in the upper body, in arms forbidden from embracing but capable of describing, in the air, a longed-for embrace: these traditional choreographies crumble like stones breaking off a building with every drum beat, leaving a strange new architecture in their wake.

The dancers are trying something new, something sexy, but its manifestation is stilted. Their bodies lurch and peck like roosters; Sbong, unused to complex or energetic footwork, makes up for her inexperience with enthusiasm and hops from foot to foot. It's as if they are trying, with all their might, to loosen up.

Off to one side, some Cambodian youths have taken to the dance floor, and are swinging their arms in a semblance of grooving. The governor's wife – long black hair, small black top – eventually accepts a request to dance, and in the moment before the dancing begins, she and her partner pause, stare at one another, and prepare to cast off the crutches of generations. The moment is like an intake of breath. *Here we go! This is how fun goes! We're about to have fun!*

It's a silly, funny scene, but it speaks – however inadvertently – to the heart of the film. Life's joys are labour. Riches, freedom, beauty, youth: they're a job, and you can either do them badly or well. Hedonism is hard work, and it takes practice to get it right. •

Life's joys are labour. Riches, freedom, beauty, youth: they're a job.



Echoes, Ode to Silence

Cath Carver
06 June 2019

Andres Arochi's short film uses dance to revisit Luis Barragán's masterpiece of modernist architecture

https://youtu.be/B319Fpu7wEo

Echoes, Ode To Silence, a short experimental film directed by Andres Arochi, first premiered on the global video platform Nowness. It takes us into Casa Estudio in Mexico City, until 1988 the personal residence of Mexican architect Luis Barragán. Borne out of a desire to experiment with 'emotional architecture', the home's crisp modernist lines and bold colours provide a dramatic backdrop for the piece.

Arochi wanted to explore the energy of the house, and felt that a conventional documentary wouldn't cut it. Instead, he chose to incorporate the dynamic medium of dance. The play and experimentation which dance allow, help create a non-conventional architectural tour – an ecstatic and expressive journey – into Casa Estudio's *genius loci*.

A troupe of six dancers traverse its diverse pockets of spaces: intimate shadowy corners, a private bedroom, a dank garden, an iconic floating staircase, and sunny brightly-coloured courtyards. Light complements shadow, as limbs swirl amidst the cement.

Diego Mur's choreography is characterised by repeated convulsing: bodies double over with arms hanging, only to jerk upright, before gliding down again; and then rebound back up with redoubled fervour. These motions of static hang and energetic





flailing seem to embody the quintessential expansiveness yet also deeply private uses designed into the fabric of the home. Private contemplation and solitude are contrasted in the movement, and the power of this contrast underlines the visionary nature of the architecture itself. Barragán's big thinking and thought-leadership in architectural design has led to this site being preserved, loved and known as iconic.

The opening scene shows a round naked back slowly bobbing to the surface of a murky pond. Often dancers are locked at the shoulders, heads buried below arms to form a Minotaur-like mass of rippling backs. Used to striking effect, this shield of backs remind us that every house must provide structure and shelter. In other scenes, flailing long hair suggests rebellion from the restraint of tradition, and the uncontainable dynamism of Barragán's visionary genius. One dancer walks across a vertical pink wall, held horizontally in place by her partner. Classical rules are broken, and the impossible becomes possible in this modernist palace.

Despite all the movement, a brooding stillness pervades

Stylist Alia González's costuming, with its deep raspberry pink trousers, rusty or soft dusky pink shirts, and bare human skin echoes the colours of the walls, softly building chromatic layers to the cinematography.

Despite all the movement, a brooding stillness pervades. The minimal ambience of Sebastián Lechuga's soundscape – a mix of water sounds, distorted guitar riffs and synthetic reverb – increases in drama throughout but remains subdued. The calm is underlined in motionless moments, when entwined dancers remain inert, locked into the silence and mystery of the space. Every dancer eventually surrenders to stillness as the piece closes.

Flesh in form. Skin in structure. Dynamism in intimacy. Surrender in stillness. Arochi must be congratulated for a powerful film that effectively uses the raw expressive potential of dance to embody the energetic resonances of a complex architectural masterpiece. •

Szerpentin Dance Film Festival

Lena Megyeri
01 Jul 2019

Relaunched in 2017, Szerpentin continues to stimulate new production and forge partnerships

Budapest, Hungary
25-28 April 2019

What is Szerpentin?

Named after Loïe Fuller's *Serpentine Dance*, the biennial Szerpentin Dance Film Festival takes place in Budapest, Hungary. It is directed by Gábor Pintér (artistic director of the Parallel Art Foundation, which organises the festival) who has been working with dance film for almost fifteen years, having launched and run the EDIT festival from 2005 to 2011, then relaunched it as Szerpentin in 2017. Apart from showcasing recent works from Hungary and abroad, Pintér's main goals are to stimulate the creation of new films and forge international relationships.

As well as showing Hungarian works to an international audience, the 2019 festival placed a premium on international partnerships and co-productions, as well as on international short films, selected through an open call which attracted entries from 38 countries. Szerpentin then presented separate blocks of Finnish, Dutch, Romanian and French films, in co-operation with festival curators from their respective countries. Also on the programme was *Overground – Dancing Cities Budapest*, a 20-minute film co-produced by Parallel and the French *All We Can Do Is Dance* project.

Just like contemporary dance itself, dance film often defies genre categorisation. Pintér likes that: he looks out for new works not only in the dance scene but also in the fields of fashion, design, photography and so on, where many artists use choreographic approaches in their films – sometimes without even realising it.



Hana Yamazaki's *The Act of Breathing*, winner of the Best Film Award and the Hungarian Shorts Audience Award

Springback at Szerpentin 2019

The Act of Breathing, winner of both the Best Film Award and the Hungarian Shorts Audience Award, was **Hana Yamazaki**'s diploma work for Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design. In her thank-you speech, she credited Pintér and his festivals for encouraging her to make dance films herself.

An experimental animation, the film revolves around the physical and emotional qualities of breathing. It starts with enigmatic pictures of moving, rolling, 'breathing' plastic sheets, rendered weirdly unnatural through the animation technique.



An atmosphere of constant danger: track32 by István Illés

Later, a human body (dancer Gabriella Bathó) becomes more and more apparent through the plastic material, and it becomes clear that it is her body and breathing that animate the veil. At the end of this poetic story of unfolding, Bathó finally lets the veil fly away and stands motionless.

The International Shorts Audience Award went to the Spanish film *Timecode*, which also won the Palme d'Or for Best Short Film in Cannes 2016 and was even an Academy Award nominee for Best Live Action Short Film in 2017. You can see why **Juanjo Giménez Peña**'s picture is such a favourite among audiences and juries: the most classically narrative film at Szerpentin (almost the only one), it tells a complete tale in 15 minutes, with heart and humour. Through a series of coincidences, two parking lot security guards (one woman, one man) are surprised to find that they share a secret passion: dance. Their story shows that all we need to really connect is not words but movements – and perhaps a few well-placed CCTV timecodes.

Timecodes also play an important role in *track32*, directed by Hungarian **István Illés**. Two dancers face each other from opposite sides of a busy highway, but sometimes we see them only through the lens of CCTV cameras. Tension grows as they manoeuvre towards one another through traffic lanes and frantically honking cars. Finally they meet in the middle, and engage in a dangerous and highly calculated duet. With just one wrong move, we learn what it can mean to be lost too deeply in dance and in another's eyes. The atmosphere of constant danger is underlined by Nine Inch Nails' *Track 32* from their album series Ghosts, and by Beatrix Simkó's sharp choreography.

A lot of films in the selection, especially the French ones, placed dancers into unusual, mostly urban spaces; yet the location often seemed to serve a more

All we need to really connect is not words but movements



Hä*Wie!? Collective and Nils Löfke: *Günni*, winner of the International Shorts Best Film Award

decorative than functional purpose. By contrast, *Overground – Dancing Cities Budapest* takes this approach to the next level. The French *All We Can Do Is Dance* project has already visited several cities in Europe, shooting short films with dancers and choreographers, always improvised in a single shot, that are as much portraits of the dancers as of the cities themselves. In autumn 2018 *All We Can Do* arrived in Budapest at the invitation of Parallel, and filmed with ten dancers at locations ranging from hotel ballroom to tram station, airport passageway to riverbank. *Overground* is a 20-minute distillation of that work, and can be taken both as a crash course in Hungarian contemporary dance and as a unique guided tour through the city.

The winner of the International Shorts Best Film Award was *Günni*, directed by **Hä*Wie!? Collective** and **Nils Löfke** from Germany. It too plays with urban spaces, but in a very different way. This is one of those films that doesn't feature actual dance at all, but very much takes a choreographic approach to movement and space. The tricky camera angles have the effect that at first we can't fully grasp the spaces we see on screen; only through moving objects or people do they become clear. Everyday movements are taken out of context and come across grotesque and constructed, while people get into formations against geometric shapes of walls, pavements, fences or lawns. All this playfulness is matched by a soundscape that doesn't seem to fit at all: animal noises, gunshots and screams form the background to this witty movement experiment.

Many dance films originate as adaptations of stage works, but *Le Faune*, by French-born choreographer **Joseph Simon**, is much more than that: it is a fresh and modern reinterpretation of Nijinsky's legendary piece. Four modern-day nymphs dance in a white, minimalistic ballet studio, while the camera directs our gaze through bare legs. It is almost voyeuristic, as if from the point of view of the faun himself. The weird eroticism of Nijinsky's choreography is reinterpreted here through blurred images, close-ups of naked body parts and the intimate chatter of the nymphs, who share sexual fantasies and daydream about the faun. Debussy's music merges with a new score by Jimmi Jo Hueting, and the poetic, almost fog-like whiteness makes a strong visual impact.

60 Seconds Dance is an international online competition co-produced by three partners from Finland, Denmark and Norway for one-minute dance films – a format that almost seems to have become a genre of its own.

The weird eroticism of Nijinsky's choreography is reinterpreted



Joseph Simon's *Le Faune*: a fresh and modern reimagining of Nijinsky's classic

Some of these films made it to Szerpentin. *Bang*, by **Jan Vesela** from Denmark/Sweden – which won the Finnish and Norwegian finals of the 2018 online competition – even got a jury's Special Mention Award in the International Shorts category. The clashing bodies of the two dancers evoke a lot of metaphorical meanings; even Marina Abramović and Ulay's performance *Relation in Space* comes to mind. Naked skin, long eye-contact and an embrace gone wrong – that's a lot of drama for just 60 seconds.

Beside the film screenings, Szerpentin also offered some extras, including an improvisation dance event by **Willany Leó** collective in cooperation with visual artist **Martha Kicsiny**, and the artist talk and archive film screening '*Then*', marking the thirtieth anniversary of the end of the communist era in Hungary. The next edition of the festival is planned for 2021, but in the meantime Pintér has an exciting time ahead: the Hungarian selection of short films will travel to festivals all around the world, while more and more artists are asking for his help in developing and realising their dance film ideas as well. His most important and perhaps most challenging task will be to find funding opportunities and co-producing partners for his many plans. •

Dogtooth

Anastasio Koukoutas
02 July 2019

The distorting mirror of dance reflects an intimate reality of adolescent vulnerability in Dogtooth

https://youtu.be/KLOy4_tzXHY



Family dystopia: the dance scene from Yorgos Lanthimos' 2009 *Dogtooth*

Cinema is often a distorting mirror of society, accentuating its controversies or fooling us by making the phenomenal look ordinary. Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* (2009), is a film of rare, disturbing beauty – so uncomfortably bizarre, actually, that injects you for days after with a relentless feeling of discontent. The film – among others – also marked the so-called 'Greek weird wave', a cinematic label known mostly for its uncanny, off-kilter aesthetics and extreme stylisation of language which became, for movie culture in Greece, an omen for a traumatising period of austerity and precariousness.

Indeed, *Dogtooth* combines the unvarnished cruelty of Michael Haneke's films with the stylised, social critique of Pasolini's *Teorema*. It places us in a middle-class household, only to make it look, some scenes later, like a morbid playground of patriarchy. A family with three children, who have been raised within the confines of their home, is living what appears to be an ordinary life. However, no sooner does a crack appear in their polished mundanity than we see the house turned into a microcosmic dystopia: an unforgiving and dispassionate father, a mother both compliant with and complicit in his deeds, and three children – a boy and two girls – who seem existentially unprepared for the troubles of their adolescence.

The children struggle to express themselves, and to settle in the world their parents have constructed for them. In their language everything is distorted: the words, their way of being in the world, of being themselves, with themselves and with the others. These teens have nothing in common with the

usual effervescent youth depicted in the movies: their bodies are clumsy, deprived of their sexuality – or suspended in a sexuality that looks abnormally innocent. Their movements occupy space but seem untuned, misplaced, contrasting even more with the orchestrated environment of their home. Caught between the hilarious and the authentically vulnerable, all three of them convey the opposite of what society would like them to be: normal, and captive in their own bodies. This is most evident in the scene of a manic ballet performed by the two girls to celebrate their parents' anniversary.

In a pas des deux of neurotic bourrées, the girls move sideways like toothpicks, ungraceful yet strangely familiar, reminiscent of our first steps into adolescence and its frantic demeanour. Facing the camera – as if being filmed at that very, embarrassing moment – the younger girl moves slightly more slowly, waiting for a signal or a gesture to copy from her sister. When the younger withdraws, claiming she is tired, the older plunges into a stream of wacky expressiveness. It's like *Flashdance*, but minus the sexy, minus the shared gratification of her dancing, and plus a far more bewildering gaze.

We certainly don't marvel at her dancing gifts; instead we question them, and at the same time we also feel 'questioned'. Her jumps don't elevate her; her splits sound more like 'ouch' than 'wow'; her backbends ache like a bad tooth. And instead of a mesmerised committee of judges, the parents remain aloof yet dominantly present during her show. Her brother, an unbothered guitar accompanist, highlights what can scarcely be missed: the girl's struggle to give pleasure to her audience, the girl's body that has to remain flexible yet unbreakable if she is ever to escape this morbid environment.

> **Many of us remember how uncomfortable we felt in our adolescent bodies**

This dance sequence, because of its queer ambiguity, makes us feel both saddened and uplifted. As many of us might remember how uncomfortable we felt in our adolescent bodies of ungainly yearning, it is often liberating to see and realise that exaggeration could also be taken as mockery: an accomplishment in reverse, one that doesn't praise our strength, but rather our vulnerability. •



The Favourite

Róisín O'Brien
06 August 2019

Dance in place and out of time: anachronisms in Yorgos Lanthimos' The Favourite are part of a fickle world

https://youtu.be/DhHZvNtWSo4

Yorgos Lanthimos' delightfully perverse *The Favourite* saw much-loved British actress Olivia Colman play eighteenth-century British monarch Queen Anne.

Anne suffers the worst curse for female royals: the inability to bear an heir. Trapped within a body deemed useless, devoid of stimulus, and immobilised by pus-filled legs under scaffolded dresses, she is both almighty and irrelevant. She becomes a puppet to her parliament and courtiers, not least to her closest advisor Sarah Churchill (Rachel Weisz).

This world of precarious alliances and pompous display is made overt in the court dance scene, choreographed by **Constanza Macras**. Anne is wheeled in: her court pause, out of obligation, to bow before resuming their mingling.

The movement of the court is stiff, formal. Robert Harley (Nicholas Hoult) awkwardly pops back into his hip when supplicating to Anne, with both enforced poise and simmering frustration. His cheeks are bloodily rouged; his wig a small, tortured sheep.

Not so Sarah. She sweeps in, a demanding physical presence that exudes power in a tastefully tailored dress. Sensing the Queen may be misled by Harley into a decision she, Sarah, would not like, she distracts the court with a dance. She circles the gaggle hawkishly, her eyes claiming everything she sees. Her pointed finger lands on her chosen partner, Samuel Masham (Joe Alwyn), as an afterthought.

At first the couple dance as we would expect; heads inclined, torsos close but not vulgar, arms at an acceptable height. We are caught up in the nullifying rhythm, we are lulled into the tasteful.

Then, Sarah is hoisted up and lashed unceremoniously around Samuel's waist. Their faces remain deadpan. Sarah is dropped down and they're voguing, messily. Once again, Sarah is awkwardly bumped up into the air, skirts a-blazing. The pair career down what now looks like a modern-day catwalk, Samuel dropping low.

The scene delights in the anachronism between intricate historical setting and parodic contemporary movement, but doesn't reconcile them (compare this more innocent scene in Brian Helgeland's 2001 *A Knight's Tale*, where the diegetic medieval music bleeds into David Bowie's 'Golden Years'.)

Instead, the scene brilliantly holds its nerve, sitting in that wonderfully murky area between naturalism and surrealism. We laugh abruptly, uncertain at what we're viewing. Our attention is sharpened, lacking cues to slip into easily readable contexts.

The camera cuts to Anne's face in an agonisingly drawn-out shot, a come-down from the dizzying high of the dance. Her features move from inane enjoyment to,



Rachel Weisz and Joe Alwyn in *The Favourite*

what, anger? Jealousy? Realisation that Sarah, her lover (as we find out next in an 'aha!' moment), might be toying with her?

The spirit of the Queen surfaces from under its fleshy, worldly confines. With both petulance and intelligence, Queen Anne barks 'Stop it!' and concludes the scene with a political move designed to enrage Sarah.

Surrounded by arcane rules, the body persists in its whims and failures. Sycophants fall in and out of line; the Queen's favour can easily become the Queen's fury.

A most fickle world of power and celebrity. •

Happy Together

Anastasio Koukoutas
23 August 2019

A tango scene in Wong Kar-wai's Happy Together invites our hearts into the spaces between separation and togetherness, fiction and reality

https://youtu.be/LOac2hpJbTI

There are phrases, like the Beckettian 'Try again. Fail again. Fail better', which can become, for some personal reason, a life motto. There are movies, which for the same reason, verify and enhance the desire to place oneself into the very heart of a cinematic narrative, to exchange fiction for reality.

Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* (1997) is a film about the promise of renewal, about tender love and male friendship. Yet it is also a film about personal paths, multiple endings and beginnings, a roller coaster of choices bringing us all the same to where it all started: a game, a persistent paradox, a life in full. And what makes this spiralling of 'endless beginnings' priceless is their echoing in our own emotional status, like an invitation into a vortex of feelings which would otherwise remain inaccessible.

As in most of Wong's films, the protagonists – in this case two men, Lai Yiu-fai (Tony Leung) and Ho Po-wing (Leslie Cheung) – exist and interact within the visual array of an urban setting. Buzzing metropolitan cities, like Hong Kong and Buenos Aires, alternate with the poetic drenched tones of inner environments and places, like apartments and bars. This mundane setting of everyday city life is juxtaposed with the sensational, untamed beauty of Iguazu Falls. The Falls remain a beautiful metonymy throughout the film, an ideal place where forces of nature unleash their awe-inspiring seductiveness, making its spectacle both a haven of instinctive attraction and a fatal trap for unaccomplished dreams.

Another visible if not tactile characteristic of this film is how bodies approach each other, embrace, caress, hold firmly or lead gently, with the excuse of learning tango. Tango, largely exoticised as a dance of passion and explicit male dominance, here returns to its queer roots, challenging both roles of leader and follower, male-to-male proximity and improvised encounters. For our two characters, tango remains their only way to access desire, yet between them it is not an accomplished body language, not an evidence of grace. Their tango is a sign of constant renegotiation of space and feelings, an intimate event of reaching towards the other, but with the fear of what this coming together might bring.

In the scene where Ho teaches Lai a series of back steps in their shabby apartment, the learning process is an affirmation of their tacit desire. Ho abandons Lai in his attempt to learn the steps; he sits on a chair, his back turned, as if he is fed up with the unsuccessful trials of his partner. Lai re-approaches him, insisting on his trying again – but how to succeed in moving together without allowing oneself to be touched, to be reached?

Wong Kar-wai cleverly changes the scene to a gloomy dockland area, visually and rhythmically creating a poetic displacement for both mind

and body. As we are introduced to the sounds of Astor Piazzolla, we return once again to the confined space of the two lovers' cohabitation. Showered in a warm kitchen light – a far cry from an ideal setting – the two bodies now surrender gracefully to the melodies of the accordion, sustaining proximity not simply as closeness, but as an unfulfilled attempt to move towards, to reach, to touch, to kiss the other. In their kissing, the two now long to come even closer, their movement driven by desire, their desire moved by an unreachable unity, their bodies seeking to transgress their own boundaries. The director keeps the angle firm to heighten the yearning sensation brought by the two characters; and while our senses peak the scene is once again cut and alternated with the unfamiliar surroundings of a bar.

And just like the protagonist, we are drunk with the momentary happiness of this scene, the sense of belonging which makes a squalid kitchen a place like home. Or perhaps we are carried away by our own waterfall of emotions, both fictional and real, like the trembling light of a lamp which once led the way to our own escape. •

Both a haven of instinctive attraction and a fatal trap for unaccomplished dreams



Tony Leung and Leslie Cheung in Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together*

London International Screendance Festival 2019

Suzanne Frost
12 Nov 2019

Screendance is a genre that speaks of and to our time

Screendance is a 'thing'. While still an incredibly niche practice within the already niche genre of dance, this hybrid artform of movement and media, where the choreography of the body and the choreography of the camera are of equal importance, is creating a new visual language that speaks very obviously of and to our time.

In 2019, London has in fact seen two new screendance festivals: Frame Rush at The Place in March, led by postgraduate students; and the London International Screendance Festival at Trinity Laban in September, curated by choreographer **Charles Linehan**. Linehan worked three years to take this project from seed idea to fruition, and with his panel viewed over 200 entries from across the globe.

The first edition of this now biennial festival showed 24 dance films, including five world premieres, demonstrating the eye-popping variety of visual language, effects, moods and modes of storytelling this medium allows for.

Unlike the stage, where part of the journey to faraway lands takes place within the audience's imagination, the screen allows us to watch dance in remote locations, taking us into urban environments or desolate landscapes, the Paris metro or a lonely beach in northern England. The need for the dancing body to interact with nature feels overwhelming, as film-maker after film-maker is drawn to capture dance in the forest or by the water, revelling in the beauty of its mirroring effect for the moving body.

Deeply mystical and full of symbolism: Philippe Saire's Les Sirènes. Photo © Gregory Batardon



In *Les Sirènes – Chant XII* (Switzerland), **Philippe Saire** lets his three female dancers move across the urban landscape of Lausanne which is slowly immersed in rising water, until finally the women dive in and disappear like mermaids. The 15-minute meditation results in a deeply mystical film full of symbolism – not least the image of the three norns, goddesses of fate who decide on the end of time with breezy fickleness. *Les Sirènes* cites Homer's *Odyssey* as its model, but it also seems to be saying something about climate change and rising sea levels, with the three playful, silly, sometimes giggly dancers representing the shockingly casual attitude of humankind to the imminent disaster.

Harry Brooks' (UK) contribution to the festival, *Silent Imprints*, uses the closeness to water to riff on its symbolism for inner turmoil and deeply hidden emotions. His young man, who 'for whatever reason experiences transition in his life', delivers a captivating performance, full of vulnerability, aggression, melancholy and a vague sense of longing. When he finally speaks to the camera about his deeply felt loneliness, his words only repeat what has already been said, and instinctively understood, so eloquently by his moving body.

For all the visual trickery on offer, the dance films that work best are those that, just like on stage, have a charismatic performance at the heart of the story. **Omari Carter** of Motion Dance Collective



Harry Brooks' *Silent Imprints*: full of vulnerability, aggression and melancholy

uses *Finding My Feet* to let us in on the frustrating struggle of a dancer overcoming injury. A torn meniscus left Carter trapped in a body that could no longer do what it used to. Carter applies a mock-documentary style, talking directly to camera about his experience, which then zooms in on strained, trembling muscles while he retrains, and occasionally blurs the lens to suggest moments of rage and frustration. Carter is a compelling storyteller, and while you have every intention to focus on his editing and camera angle choices, you end up absorbed in the story.

An equally successful charm offensive is *And So say All Of Us* by **Mitchell Rose** (USA), commissioned by Brooklyn Academy of Music to celebrate its long-standing executive producer Joseph V Melillo. Rose profits from the collective star power of 52 seminal choreographers doing what they do best, from the ever elegant William Forsythe throwing shapes in an elevator to virtuoso Benjamin Millepied showing off his batterie on a trampoline or mad mime artist James Thierée pulling grimaces. It's a treat to watch, if maybe a bit commercial: you kind of wonder what they will try to sell you at the end of the trailer.

In *Floating Chronologies*, **Mary Fitzgerald** and **Dimitri von Klein** (USA) zap all the colour out of the Arizona desert, the black-and-white sand dunes resembling cracked elephant skin. **Shon Kim** (Korea) and **Lottie Kinslake** (UK) use animation and humour, the former editing the illustrations of book pages so that the little figures start to dance with a jagged, Chaplinesque movement quality reminiscent of early black-and-white films.

The technical arsenal of film-making allows for stunning visual effects, such as in *Focus* by **John Degois** and **Olivier Bonnet** (France) where the dancer at the centre of the camera moves forward while the

Staring at screens has become a collective obsession of humankind



A perfect synthesis of editing, musicality, camera and movement. *Digital Afterlives* by Richard James Allen and Karen Pearlman

people around him at a busy Paris metro station move in reverse – an idea similar to Coldplay's music video for *The Scientist*, and equally poetic and bittersweet.

Attending a screendance festival sometimes feels like watching MTV in the 90s: a steady succession of ever-new clips in bite-sized format, waiting for your favourite to come on. Occasionally all the stars align and a film achieves a perfect synthesis of editing, musicality, camera and human movement. *Digital Afterlives* by **Richard James Allen** and **Karen Pearlman** (The Physical TV Company, Australia), sees Allen himself, dressed all in white with winged angel shoes, dance through a black infinity with a bemused look on his face, like someone who just died and went to heaven – only to realise the afterlife isn't at all what he expected. Or did anyone guess it would be angels in trainers exhaustedly jumping around to Franz Liszt? Brimming with digital effects such as multiplying, overlaying, zooming and shrinking, it is the virtuosic musicality of this choreography of tricks that stands out, and a sweet whimsical humour perhaps comparable to Disney's masterpiece *Fantasia*.

Whether we want to admit it or not, staring at screens has become a collective obsession of humankind, and the more we stare the more we get used to – or actually need – an ever-changing kaleidoscope of different impressions and fast editing in our life. Watching 24 films in two evenings, many no longer than a pop song, is an intense experience that can be occasionally overwhelming, but certainly entertaining. When people complain about modern times and millennials, they usually bemoan their allegedly short attention span. The Screendance Festival feels a bit like going down the rabbit hole, binge watching YouTube videos all night – but then, doesn't that sound like a perfect way to reach a new generation for dance? •

Kung Fu Hustle

Stephen Chow's 2004 martial arts comedy masterpiece *Kung Fu Hustle* is packed to the teeth with references. Several members of the cast are well-known actors from 1970s Hong Kong action films. Twice, Chow references his earlier film *Shaolin Soccer*. And the film's original score, by Raymond Wong, is inspired by traditional Chinese music used in 1940s swordplay/wuxia films – though the iconic opening track, 'Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained', draws on the gangster film noir tradition of moody brass.



'Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained' introduces Kwok-Kwan Chan as Brother Sum, leader of the notorious Axe Gang. Moments before the song starts, we watch Brother Sum brutally slay the leader of a rival gang in front of a police station – revealing that the Axe Gang have paid off the cops, and insinuating that no law-abiding citizen is safe from their wicked machinations.

What makes this killing especially startling is Brother Sum's psychotic, almost gleeful approach to the murder. His rival is felled by a thrown axe to the knee, severing the leg. Brother Sum is handed an axe by an off-screen henchman, and begins to sashay towards the luckless, legless gangster. But the music he is cavorting to is 'Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained' – audible only to the audience, and to the crazed axe-killer.

This does two things. First, it places Brother Sum outside the realm of even this film's wacky, cartoonish world: he is propelled by a force beyond the reach of the other characters to plummet to unimaginably evil depths. But it also emphasises the level of choreography a martial arts film requires: the attention to detail of movement and respect for its lineage necessary for the film's achievement.

And so, having set up the antagonist so succinctly, Chow moves to the operating practices of the Axe Gang themselves. If filmed from the front, this scene

Ka Bradley
23 October 2019

Slick, stylish, violent... the Axe Gang in Stephen Chow's Kung Fu Hustle know how to cut a figure on the dance floor – and off it

https://youtu.be/DpbPRfq_8DU



would force us to face the slickly sliding villain; but the camera is suspended from above, imparting a sense of his impassable inhumanity.

Brother Sum is still breezing to his own beat. He describes a zigzag pattern with his laconic steps, like a chess piece moving across the board to its own private rules. When he snaps his fingers to bring on a pair of suit-clad goons, they move together in a loose two-step. More and more goons flood on between cut-scenes of violent, gang-related death, heralded by the smoky snap of an old-fashioned camera flash.

The deliberate heaviness and the relaxed, even floppy joints, combined with the linear composition that recalls something military and drill-like, is an arrogant tell. The Axe Gang are tough, united, macho, but don't need to try hard to flaunt it: frankly, they can do this all day.

The first shock is the lazy kick that is balanced by thrown-back heads – the bare flash of throat and face jolts the audience out of passive spectatorship. The scene cuts away again – more details of crimes – and when we return to the Axe Gang, we are confronted by – borne down on by – a mass of aggressive bodies.

With so many gangsters ranged on the floor, and the camera so close, their threat is palpable. Their movements have become more frenetic, more belligerent – axes pumped in the air, hips tossed from side to side, heads swivelling. In the meantime, the intercut scenes become more detailed, and their realism makes the Axe Gang's war dance all the more conspicuous. As the music builds to a climax, we know one thing for sure: these edged weapons will keep us too on edge.

The Axe Gang don't need to try hard to flaunt it: frankly, they can do this all day

Dancing in the schoolyard

Stella Mastorosteriou
02 December 2019

T-step on the tarmac? A school principal's plan to get kids moving in a short time and small space goes viral

https://youtu.be/UkaJrzd6-hw



The kids are all right: Zhange Pengfei leading his students in the shuffle

In a short video that went viral, we watch a whole elementary school – students and teachers alike – shuffle-dancing in perfect sync and alignment, inside their schoolyard, in China's Shanxi province. More videos and interviews followed that elucidated the goal of the original dance project.

Elementary school principal Zhang Pengfei noticed that the current curriculum failed to motivate his students to exercise and, like many kids growing up in a tech-savvy, increasingly online world, they would rather spend their breaks on their phones. As all innovative teachers know, solutions are not always to be found within the limits of the official curriculum, so Principal Zhang thought outside of the box: he learned a shuffle-dance routine and introduced it to his students and colleagues, so that they could dance together during recess.

Since autumn 2018, Principal Zhang has been leading a schoolyard full of kids and teachers to shuffle to feelgood songs. Zhang's novel approach not only addresses the need to motivate kids to exercise more, but also offers a solution to the issue of lack of space. The limited space of the playground hosts 700 children during breaks, and thus cannot accommodate

> It is true that the freedom of expression ingrained in club dance culture gets lost along the way

ball games or allow all of them to run around freely. Shuffling, by contrast, can be done on the spot and Zhang organised the kids in lines and rows, to which they adhere remarkably.

The fact that Zhang picked the shuffle as his dance of choice is interesting. Shuffling originated in the early 90s rave dance scene of Australia, known then as the Melbourne shuffle. It is also referred to as 'cutting shapes' or 'stomping', both indicative of the rhythmical, sharp movement involved. It is a high-intensity, fast-tempo dance mainly consisting of vigorous heel–toe motions of the feet coordinated to intricate arm movements, mainly danced to electronic music.

Like many other 90s trends, shuffling became popular with the rise of social media. It definitely takes an open mind and some creative thinking to transfer a dance from the rave clubs to the rigidness of an educational system. It is true that the freedom of expression ingrained in club dance culture gets lost along the way. A schoolyard of uniformly dressed children dancing in perfect sync can take on many connotations. Uniformity is historically used as a regulatory tool by various authoritative systems. From school uniforms and dress codes to military parades, it is employed in order to suppress individuality and to promote discipline. Zhang's students, in their bright uniforms and in perfect alignment, definitely seem disciplined. But the lightness of the dance that reflects on their faces is multiplied through their use of uniformity, and diffuses a sense of joy.

Shuffling might look simple, but is definitely not: the bouncy, aerobic dance increases heart and breathing rate and demands stamina and highly complex coordination skills. The kids, rosy-cheeked and smiling, execute the moves with admirable dedication. They stomp, hop, pump their arms and shout in unison, following Zhang's lead and tuned together by the constant rhythmical bouncing from one foot to the other. The group has managed to go beyond the basic steps, namely *the running man* (imitating running on the spot, sliding the feet backwards) and *t-step* (a side step on one leg twisting on the heel). They learned several elaborately choreographed routines, full of sharp arm movements, intricate footstep patterns, ankle twists and constant changes of direction. Their full on concentration is adorably inscribed on their faces as they dance.

In terms of Zhang's core objective – getting kids moving – the experiment can only be considered successful: the kids are bouncing, the heart beats are rising, the endorphins are flowing, the calories are burnt – and all before their break is over. •

International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy

Marie Pons
19 Feb 2020

Surrealism's enduring allure for creators of video dance

Le Creusot, France
16–19 October 2019

videodansebourgogne.com



Talley Beatty in Maya Deren's *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (1945)

The 11th edition of the International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy took place in the town of Le Creusot in France 16–19 October 2019. Curated by Marisa C Hayes and Franck Boulègue, the rendezvous screens a selection of films chosen via a themed open call: this year, Surrealism.

Hayes and Boulègue are committed to sharing the versatile medium that is dance on film, and bring a rich programme to this small town. On Friday night the screenings take place in Le petit théâtre du château de la Verrière, a small theatre in the style of Le Petit Trianon in Versailles that once made crystal glasses for Marie Antoinette. The stucco and painted angels adorning the ceiling are the perfect decor to welcome the surrealist programme.

This year, the festival showcased the groundbreaking work of **Maya Deren** – an important figure of experimental cinema in the 1940s, auteur of a dozen films which she often directed, wrote, starred in and edited – enriched by the live composition of the band Mona Kazu, improvising on the three films presented.

A Study in Choreography for Camera (1945) can be seen as an entry point into her visually fascinating work. This carefully constructed short film is a study on dance and camera in dialogue. Deren uses the frame, editing and the dancer's moves to disrupt a normative apprehension of time and space in order to focus on pure movement. A développé begins in a forest and ends in a living-room, a grand jeté brings the dancer from the forest to the seaside. Choosing close-ups that isolate body parts (the dancer's pointed toes or face) appears as a trick to transition from one space to another. Repetition is also used as a jump-cut device, like a pirouette being repeated and accelerated until the frame changes. The choreographic vocabulary and direction choices convey the feeling of research in motion.

This way of shaking up time and space as it is experienced on screen appears repeatedly in the festival's international selection of films, suggesting a thread connecting films of the 1940s to more recent works. Whether by gliding from one element of decor to another; drifting without any sense of gravity or physical barrier, as in a dream; or breaking free from any narrative logic or creating a whole world out of disparate elements, the films presented open up imaginary worlds where the curious and the bizarre lead the way.

The Unpainted Woman by American video artist and performance maker **Kathy Rose** is made in the collage aesthetic. The faces of two women float around in a striking submarine-like environment of bright neon colors. Jellyfishes, manta rays but also eyeballs – a Surrealist motif leading right back to Luis Buñuel's traumatic scene in *Un chien andalou* – also swim across the frame; the floating faces borrow the aquatic



Uncanny adventures: Cerise Lopez's *Les Aimants*

bodies and become hybrid creatures. The aquatic creatures form garments for the women, evoking Loie Fuller's use of veils in her *Serpentine Dance*, and her use of the camera as an optical illusion. The two performers (Rose herself and Liang Yu), resemble two ocean priestesses, their inanimate, mask-like black and white faces reminiscent of the aesthetics of Noh theatre.

In *Flying Lesson* by **Rosane Chamecki**, **Andrea Lerner** and **Phil Harder**, two women in green and red boots wear wings pinned to their backs like a proper Icarus in training. The lesson begins as a tutorial on how to fly. The duet shows basic steps on the ground: bending the knees and spreading both arms at the same time, doing a lunge and tilting the arms, counting and naming each step out loud. After a minute or so, cinema takes over to fulfil the flight dream: the performers are magically lifted up in the air, spinning around as if on a carousel. As they blur, the women look almost like angels. In *The Flying Lesson* the cinematographic tricks take over from the limits of choreography, bringing to completion an impossible desire. When the protagonists leave the studio, swirling above the city and then escaping into nature, we can imagine *Wings of Desire* by Wim Wenders and its angels in a fleeting superimposition.

In **Cerise Lopez**'s *Les Aimants* (which means both 'the magnets' and 'the lovers'), images overlap to reveal sections of sceneries, worlds, objects that weave together the uncanny adventure of a flower and a bee. The film starts as if we are looking through a peephole into a meadow, where a bee is foraging in a flower. The image is blurred around the edges, and the humming of the bee begins to distort, initiating our journey. Here again, body parts have a life of their own: an eye detached and stored in a box, a hand-shaped door-knocker transforms into a real hand made of flesh. The game of textures and techniques used in the film – animation, light painting, digital images – reinforce an effect of juxtaposition. The decor reveals reversible sides, doors open onto new dimensions, windows pass across the frame, a man sitting at a table, apparently in a painting, turns out to be trapped into a snow globe. If 'dance' itself is not at the centre of the film, choreography is, precisely in this constant circulation and interactions between the objects, the characters and the frames, creating an ongoing peregrination.

In **Polish Dance Theatre**'s *Inicjacja*, we open on bare, raw concrete and pillars. The camera begins a circular sweeping



movement through the space and we are caught in this hamster wheel motion for the duration of the film. Characters begin to appear in separate vignettes, giving us glimpses into their domestic scenes, the way we might catch a slice of life when apartment windows light up at night in the city. A man at an office, a couple in a dining room, two women in a dressing room, another one in front of a religious altar... all seem frozen in their actions. Gradually, movement is breathed into the bodies and strong feelings put the characters into action: a violent argument, intoxication, scenes of confrontation. Things go haywire little by little as madness takes over, until most of the decor is wrecked. The progressive tension brought to a breaking point recalls the anxiety that can ooze from some Surrealist works. We do not know where violence comes from, but it infiltrates the continuum of *Inicjacja* until wreaking havoc.

French choreographer **Kitsou Dubois**' work has been situated at the crossroads between science and dance for many years, as she is conducting ongoing research into weightlessness, and experiments with the effects of zero gravity. A pretext for the creation of *Aquafoot* was the 2016 Euro Cup, held in France, a context cleverly appropriated to fit Dubois' enquiries. Here she uses water to relieve the performers' bodies from the pull of gravity. The two performer-players, Jorg Muller and Bertrand Lombard, are engaged in a subaquatic slow-motion football game, breaking the technical expertise of their movements down until the game appears as a collection of spicy moves that provoke the clamour of the crowd. On the green mock-lawn, every play – running towards the ball, shooting – is stretched to an extreme. The use of slow motion produces a kind of fascination, as does the final scene, when

Things go haywire little by little as madness takes over



Left: Polish Dance Theatre, *Inicjacja*.
Right: Kitsou Dubois, *Aquafoot*

one player shoots and dives, turns over and seems to bounce back out of thin air, erasing any sense that he is surrounded by tangible matter. The background is pitch black and there are no air bubbles. We forget they are in water; this might as well take place in outer space.

Time Subjectives in Objective Time by **Kati Kallio** opens with a match being lit, marking the beginning of its temporal and spatial exploration. We progress from one space to another in a circular motion: each shot slides to the left to reveal the next, like a magic lantern revealing the next image. Three dancers start to walk, carrying pipes in the room of an abandoned factory. The frame starts to slide and the walk shifts into a dance. Two performers engage in a pas de deux, spinning around while the third goes out to the door in the background and appears through a window in the next frame. She is soon joined by the couple, and the round dance becomes a trio. Synchronised runs and jumps, and a choreography working on curves in the upper body circulate throughout the different rooms. Sometimes the splice is perfect and one dancer really seems to jump from one frame to the next, but sometimes it glitches and dancers appear in multiple frames. This collusion reflects our distorted and subjective visions of time in a dreamlike atmosphere, giving flesh to this feeling of confusion.

Overall, the selection clearly moves the bar for what we consider a priori as dance films, giving space to works where the camera takes advantage of every element: decor, bodies, objects, lighting and space; and where cinematographic techniques become a strong choreographic tool. •

Climax

Ka Bradley
19 March 2020

Gaspar Noé's Climax is thrilling, stylish and harrowing. It's all prefigured in the extraordinary opening dance scene

https://youtu.be/HbIOPxIRCYs



What did the best party you've ever gone to look like? Was there buzz and glamour? Did the people seem to be merging, colliding and breaking apart as if obeying a secret, inner choreography? Did the air glow with a certain colour? Did the music beat and beat with an irresistible compulsion? The opening dance scene of Gaspar Noé's *Climax* (2018) refines the hedonistic vitality of a perfect party down into a pure intoxicating syrup, and pumps it into a visually intense five minutes of vogue and attitude.

The scene is filmed in a single shot. Most of *Climax* is filmed in long shots – one famously more than 40 minutes long – which renders its audience woozily immersed, but also thickens the sense that something *real* is taking place on screen. *Climax*'s shots mimic the way a bystander might film a brilliant impromptu street performance, or a horrible accident. The camera swoops, dives and hovers, a frantic eye that can barely contain its excitement, setting us up for a dizzying thrill-ride. The light is soaked blood-red, a visual prefiguring of the violence to come.

The camera pans down on Sofia Boutella smoking a cigarette, before following her strut across the dance floor, bringing the sightline face on. 'Supernature' by Cerrone pulses like a heartbeat, dominating the audio. Dancers are stretching, head-bopping and milling with a coiled-spring energy until Taylor Kastle takes the centre stage and begins to windmill his arms with joint-splitting speed. The spinning motion appears to work like a gear, setting the process of the dance into motion. The women begin a catwalk stride, intersecting effortlessly. Kendall Mugler spins past, vogueing like a champ. The story has begun.

In interviews, choreographer **Nina McNeely** has mentioned that most of these dancers were unused to choreographed routines, as they primarily came from street dance backgrounds, which focuses on solos. Instead of trying to force a 'super-clean' performance, McNeely's choreography has an organic energy that celebrates rather than smothers each dancer's individual style and personality.

The play-out of this celebratory ball is both a clue to the film's progress and a distillation of its exquisitely harnessed chaos. Noé shot *Climax* over 14 days, with no script and only two performers with previous acting experience (Boutella and Souheila Yacoub); the dancers were asked to improvise dialogue and give input into the storylines of their characters. This scene, with its myriad duos, groups and solos, its simultaneous happenings and its deft manipulation of focus, speaks to that collaborative pandemonium.

The focus suggests which characters the film might centre. The first notable performance is Romain Guillermic, the fulcrum of a box formation of street dancers in a corner. Their thrusting, aggressive



ABOUT



Strange times

The present phase of the coronavirus crisis is inducing strange dreams and eerie excursions. Can we make use of them to affect our future?

The opening words to this Annual recognised that its pages suddenly seem to belong to the past: pre-coronavirus. So we gave space to register thoughts and feelings that arise in the present: the initial lockdown phase. It seems appropriate to end this Annual with a pivot towards the future.

Foolish, though, to predict or prescribe it. For if the past can be referred to and the present felt, the future is at best unreliable, and more profoundly, unknowable – especially now. We readily accept that the future is not yet real; now, we expect it to be not yet normal either.

All this is making me think of Mark Fisher, best known for his book *Capitalist Realism* – the phrase he used to describe the pervasive belief in capitalism as reality, a state of affairs to which – quoting Margaret Thatcher – there is no alternative. Yet the coronavirus crisis has caused even diehard free-marketeers to intervene in the workings of capitalism, not through choice but because, well, *there is no alternative*. Suddenly, reality has indeed changed.

Many people are rightly rereading *Capitalist Realism* in these times, but I have turned to *The Weird and the Eerie*, Fisher's consideration of the 'strange'. The weird he characterises as 'that which does not belong' – alien, abnormal, but real nonetheless. The virus itself, for example, a weird little thing that makes itself at home, uninvited, in our own bodies.

It is the eerie, though, that gets inside me most – the sensation we feel 'when there is something present that should be absent, or there is nothing present when there should be something'. Haunting, in the first case, abandonment in the second.

Eeriness tugs my imagination right now. Fortunate enough to be able to take daily bike rides, I cycle through a London spookily empty of traffic and people, spellbound by the strange beauty of its abandonment. Nature and architecture mingle elegantly yet unselfconsciously: birds glide by vacant offices, petals fall on flagstones, the wind sweeps monuments and shopping arcades alike, and theatre billboards announce their shows to clouds and clean, bright air. The scenery may be besmirched by the debris of our plastic bags and parked cars; but not by our presence. To go out into this world is to feel like an interloper, as if we ourselves were ghosts from the past. Inside, meanwhile, we try to set daily routines even as strange dreams visit us at night in our sleep.

For some, this eeriness is a siren song, luring the morbid or the unwary towards oblivion. Yet we would do well to listen to it, for it shows us that there is value in our absence, both for the world and for ourselves.

I wonder, then, about dance. More than any other art, dance depends on our presence. It happens here and now, in *this* body, at *this* time, in *this* place. Physical

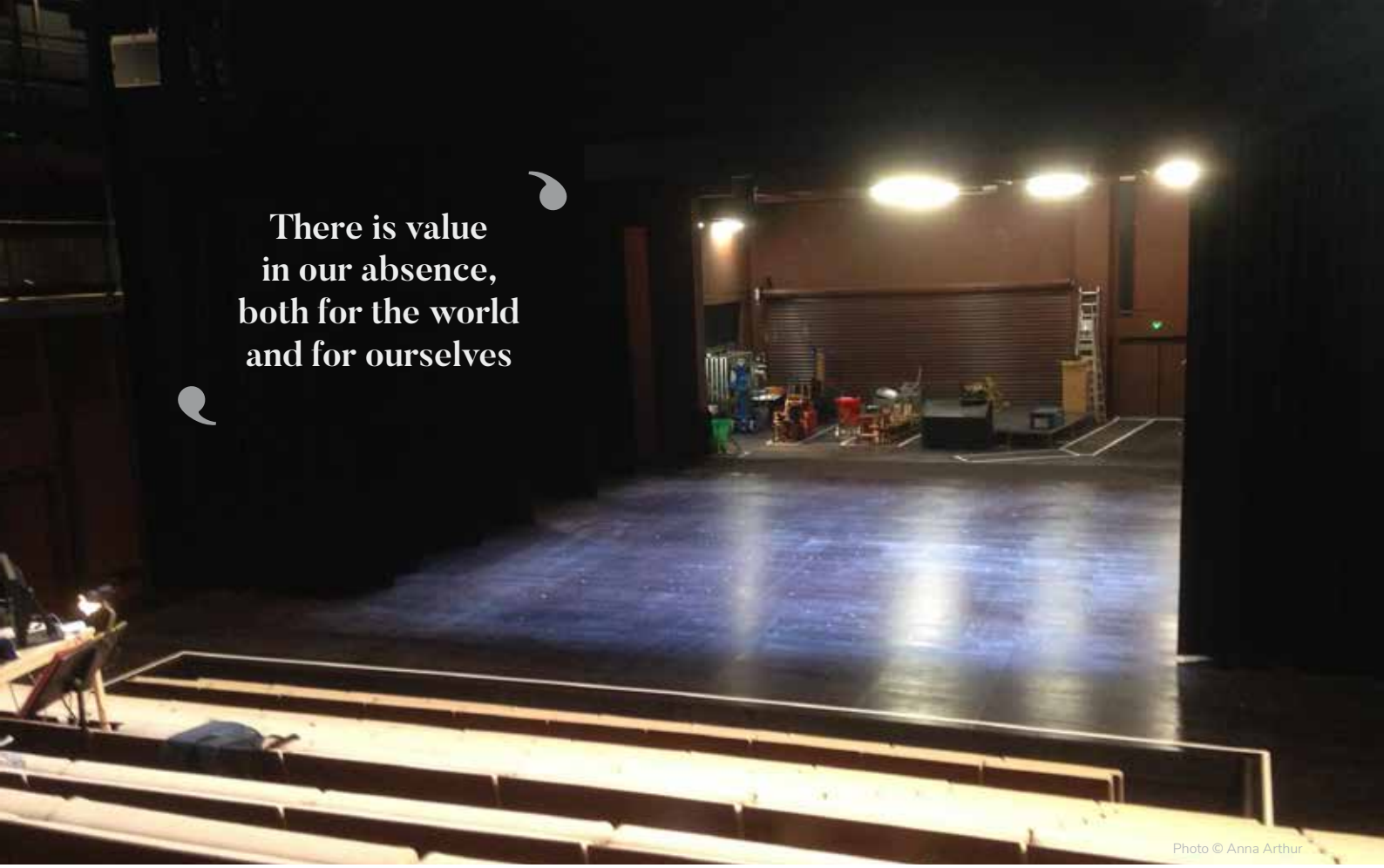


Photo © Anna Arthur

presence, proximity and assembly are fundamental to its worth.

Can we reconcile these values?

Perhaps we can combine them. When the time comes to step outside again, will we be able to put the insights of our estrangement into motion, both artistically and practically? The dreamlike time of the present is an opportunity to imagine – and hence start creating – a future.

What might it look like? A cultural infrastructure not built upon cheap flights and overproduction. 'Human resources' that emphasise that first word, not the second. Choreography that does not fetishise the self as subject. Dance that appreciates absence – space, stillness, distance, attention – as much action, interaction and statement.

Do less, be more. Leave a smaller footprint. When we step back onto the stage – of the theatre or of society – let us go slowly and tread softly, with presence of mind as well as body.

Sanjoy Roy
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Something alarming, destructive and violent is coming

progress brings Guillermic directly in front of the camera, where a spidery sequence sees him moving like a puppet in their grip. He seems bolshy and in control, but there's restriction, unnerving physical intimacy and manipulation in the choreography, hinting at the way his storyline might unfold. Will he be able to control that macho force when it overtakes him?

After a deliciously flashy vogueing sequence, Kiddy Smile leaves the DJ booth to cut a line through the dancers. Guillermic's elastic flexing solo speaks again of strange, outlandish manipulation and the extraordinary altered states of the body. There is shock value in such dramatic contortions. Something alarming, destructive and violent is coming.

The scene shifts to a loose, improvised bop before coalescing into a rehearsed ensemble piece. The camera rises, circles and dips, seeking its next point of focus, and it lands on Thea Carla Schott's sudden strip. Revealed by a curtain of trembling hands, Schott stalks into the foreground, rippling and popping. The jerking arcs of her arms, the pumps of her torso announce: *I am taking up space*. Schott is someone to keep an eye on – what part will she play in a spiral into darkness?

The last really notable solo is Boutella's, a pure bravura thing, all splits and high kicks, that sets her up as the visual centre and, insofar as *Climax* has a main character, our protagonist.

There is so much to take in. There is so much to hear, to sense, to see. It's thrilling, gorgeous – and anxiety-inducing. These things are exactly as they should be. This party won't play out peacefully – something is going to happen to make nerves fray, bodies writhe, voices howl. Noé, from the very beginning, is promising us one hell of a trip.



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