Springback Annual 2021



advancing european dance

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Springback Magazine
advancing european dance

Springback Magazine covers new contemporary dance in Europe.

Rather than follow the mainstream, we track the many streams of dance practice, performance and thought, embracing the radical, the grassroots, the current, the crazy and above all the creative. Together, these form a composite picture of European dance today.

Springback Magazine is published online throughout the year. This limited edition print annual is a gift to say thank you to our Members.

The magazine forms part of a suite of initiatives advancing reflection and communication around contemporary dance in Europe, including:

- Springback Academy, a mentored programme to nurture dance writers to contribute to the Magazine
- Springback Assembly, a meeting of people, ideas and workshops
- Springback Ringside, a new space to show dance in virtual reality

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Changes afoot

In March 2020, just before sending the last edition of the Springback Annual to print, everything changed. Suddenly, a year's worth of dance reviews and features had to be put into a new frame: Covid. At the time, I never imagined that I would be opening with the same topic a year later. More than just reframing dance, Covid has become the background to the picture itself – and it's interesting to see, in this edition of the Annual, what has come to the fore.

Most obvious is the newly prominent role of the screen. The focus has been less on 'screendance' – a well established if still niche genre of film – than on what we could call dance for the camera, with its interest more on what film can do for performance than what performance can do for film.

Recording and communication technologies have themselves moved into areas that will undoubtedly be rewarding for dance, including 360º filming, virtual reality and augmented reality. Take a look at our report from the London Film Festival on p. 88.

Has online and on-demand work made geography history? Digital 'events' have no geolocation: they are limited not by place but by time zone and internet access. Yet even as the digital realm expands, the physical world of the here and now become newly important, as travel restrictions have forced live performance to become more local and more located. Many festivals (such as Pelzverkehr, p. 20) have long been operating on a regional basis; other venues and networks would do well to learn from them.

Has dance become more hybridised? In 'blended' formats, with both a live and digital presence, certainly, but perhaps also as a form itself. I've become more aware of dance within other fields – in theatrical movement for example (p. 26), in exhibitions and installations (pp. 80, 82, 92). Indeed, I've begun to see dance wherever I look: in the postures and gesticulations of political speeches, in the everyday actions of walkers and workers, in the motion and organisation of people and traffic, in the flight of birds, and the shivering of trees in the wind.

Dance may have been largely absent from our stages but it has not disappeared; rather, it has gone off-stage. What about dance artists? Already made vulnerable by the economic climate (p. 54), their offstage survival is far more at risk.

Looking ahead to a year from now, what do I see? Not the end of Covid, or its lessons. Nor the end of dance, though its presence will be different; as will ours. In continuing to write about dance through these times, I hope that Springback will help us not only to face and to reflect upon our brave new world, but also to live in it.



Sanjoy Roy
Editor, Springback Magazine

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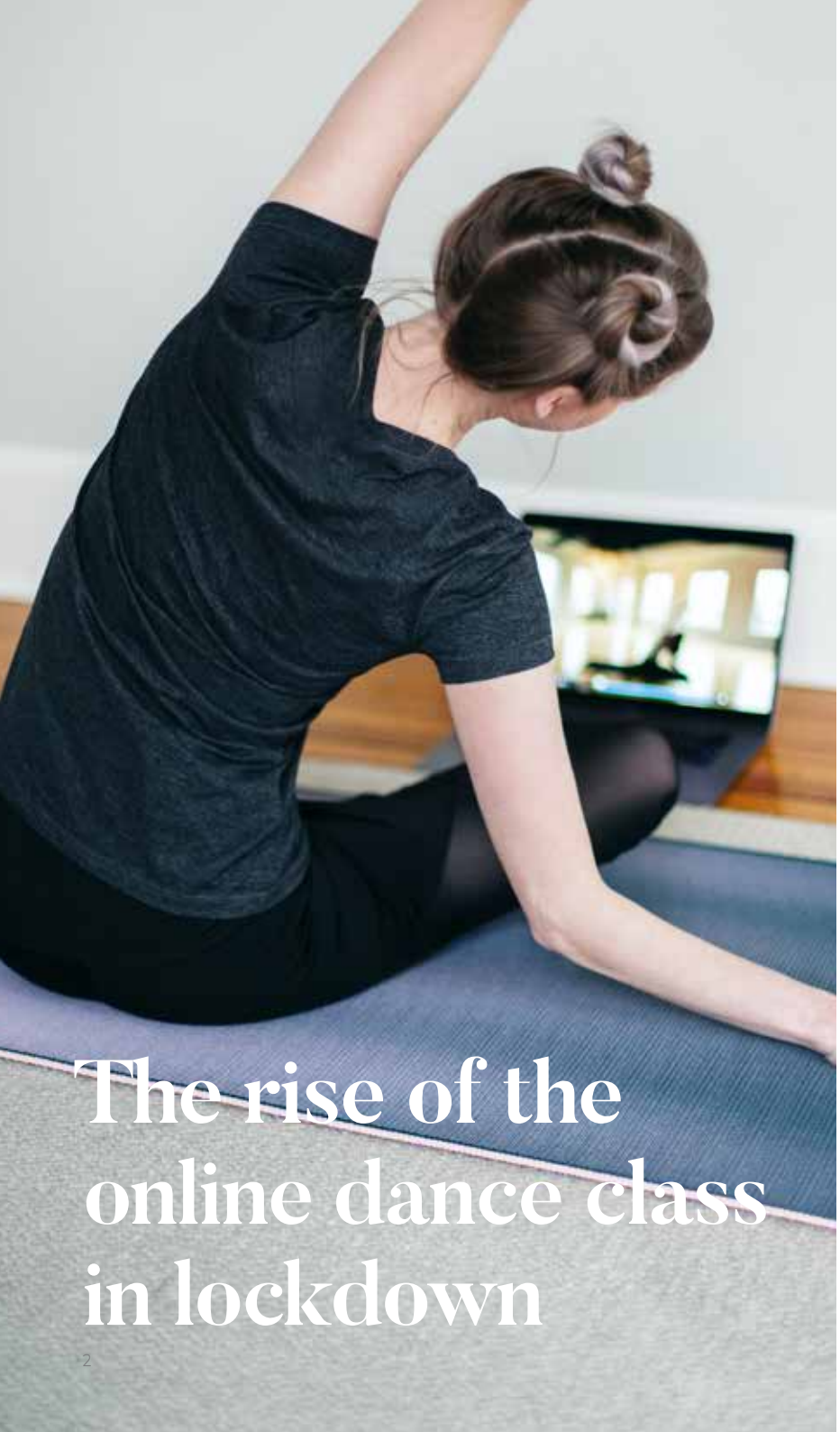
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The rise of the online dance class in lockdown

As the coronavirus crisis has forced many of us into our homes, we've had to find new, inventive ways to engage with our passions. The internet, unsurprisingly, has been the primary tool for connecting arts lovers with cultural content to see them through self-isolation: operas and theatre productions are livestreamed, art exhibitions digitised, and endless articles recommending podcasts, films, and reading material are being written.

But some artforms are easier to translate online than others. Dance classes, for example, centre around physicality. Taking place in wide-open studios free from obstacles, traditional dance classes rely on the physical presence of students, enabling partnerwork and allowing teachers to impart corrections through verbal and sensory feedback. All that is impossible to translate into the virtual realm. Or is it?

Ever since the start of the pandemic, dancers of all disciplines have been migrating from the studio into their homes to take part in digital dance classes. Conducted over a variety of platforms – notably Instagram Live and Zoom – many have been set up by high-profile dance organisations from across the world, including Matthew Bourne's New Adventures, the Royal Academy of Dance and Gaga People, to name a few.

MGDC, New York

Many classes have also been instigated by individual professional dancers themselves, such as by a number of performers from the Martha Graham Dance Company (MGDC) in New York. 'Some of our company members, such as Lloyd Knight and Charlotte Landreau, just

Emily May
08 May 2020

The offer, reach and uses of online dance classes are expanding during lockdown – and beyond?

Photo: Kari Shea / Unsplash

Charlotte Landreau teaching Graham class on Instagram Live



took it upon themselves, I don't think they even coordinated it in the beginning,' says artistic director Janet Eilber. 'We [MGDC] immediately embraced it. It's really a leading light towards what we want to do digitally in the future. We really want to build on what the dancers have started.'

Eilber's biggest takeaway from the Instagram Live classes is interactivity: 'Dancers can type comments and ask questions as if they were actually learning in the studio. It's quite different to following a YouTube video by yourself.' And it's not just about learning steps and mastering choreography. 'Graham is based on self-expression and bringing yourself to the movement,' she says. 'It has an additional level of reflection and expression that I think people need right now.'

Francesca Gavin, London

Classes are not only drawing professionals though. Take London-based art writer, curator, and self-confessed dance fanatic Francesca Gavin, who started taking dance classes around five years ago, attending hip hop and heels classes at studios including At Your Beat, Heels and Feels UK, and Base. Now, during lockdown, she is actually dancing even more than usual.

'I'm doing around three classes a day – anything less than one and I think I'd go crazy,' she says. 'I shared a video of the first class I did on my own Instagram. The minute I posted it everyone reacted to how joyous it was. Seeing people commenting, reacting with heart emojis, or the teacher giving you a shoutout [during the class] makes you feel like you are not alone. Dance is how I am getting through corona, without a doubt.'

There are challenging aspects to the format, however. 'Floorwork is really hard at home. I haven't got enough space. I'm worried I'm wearing out my carpet!' Gavin jokes. She's also terrified to look at her next phone bill. 'I don't have a very good internet connection, so when it comes to live classes I have to turn off my wifi and do it through data.'

Aside from wifi and data costs, many online dance classes in the first lockdown have been free or, like the Graham classes, operated on a donation basis. Gavin hopes many continue, noting that 'a lot of people have lost their jobs and have no income. But, of course, dancers also need to get paid for what they do. For me, anything spent on this feels worthwhile,' she adds, since online dance classes – and the sense of community they create in particular – have improved her mental wellbeing during this testing time.

Therapy of Dance, Berlin

Using dance as a tool to aid mental health has been the mission of Berlin-based community Therapy of Dance (TOD) since before the coronavirus crisis. TOD was founded as a weekly dance class in 2017 by New Zealand-born dancer Elise Mirielle Coates-Chitty when she decided to use hip hop to help her own battle with depression. 'Hip hop is very therapeutic,' says Coates-Chitty, who also finds its music particularly empowering. 'Coming to sessions, getting used to putting yourself out there and moving your body in front of the mirror to music instils you with a sense of confidence,' she adds. TOD has also grown to encompass other facets including a podcast series and live panel discussions with



An online class with Berlin-based Therapy of Dance

psychologists. 'I wanted the classes and the community to be a gateway for people who are interested in dance to explore therapy.'

The moment Berlin was placed into lockdown, students asked Coates-Chitty to put TOD online. Through Instagram Live classes, in which participants can only see the teacher on screen and interact through text, she soon realised it was most important that everyone could hear and see each other so that they could be in conversation.

'It's one thing to stay connected to people over social media, but it's another thing to offer them a service that makes them move and feel connected to their bodies and to a community, albeit online,' she says. Coates-Chitty now conducts the sessions via Zoom, with nine students at a time, which she finds more representative of TOD's in-person classes. 'We usually do these group circles at the beginning of class,' she explains. 'We were already really used to actively listening to each other and talking one by one. When that transitioned to video, everyone was very used to it and respectful.'

Coates-Chitty does admit that it is impossible to be as present and connected with other people online as they can be in real life. 'Social media isn't usually our focus. We're more about being in-person and getting people connected,' she says. However, the internet has helped TOD to expand their community beyond the confines of the German capital. Having travelled back to New Zealand before the coronavirus crisis, Coates-Chitty discovered a bunch of students who had been following TOD online, two of whom have now enlisted to start online sessions in the New Zealand time zone.

Stay connected

Instigated in response to the lockdown, digital classes look set to outlast it: many dancers are keen to continue training online. 'That way I can never talk myself out of going to class because it's an hour away!' says Gavin enthusiastically. True, the intricate nuances of the art of movement may get lost in translation – or in cyberspace – and it's hard to imagine an Instagram Live stream recreating the joy of jumping on a sprung studio floor or gliding through space with your classmates.

Yet if intimate connections are lost in the virtual realm, international ones are gained. By connecting dancers all over the world through choreography learnt in their bedrooms, digital classes give a sense of community. That will be important to remember in a post-lockdown world. 'At times like these, you can either focus on the fact we're apart and that we want to get back to the way things were,' says Eilber. 'Or you can celebrate the fact we're inventing new ways to be together that will make us even stronger in the future.' •

Instigated in response to the lockdown, digital classes look set to outlast it



www.DANCE
Partying from IRL to URL

Cath Carver
29 June 2020

Covid, digital connectivity and our deep-felt human drive to dance together have reconfigured the dance club

Photo: Axville / Unsplash

From the first Covid-19 lockdown, many of us missed the thrill of live dance performance on stages. Me? I longed most for another type of motion: durational dance parties.

So, you like to party?

Yes. I enjoy DIY dance the most. Opportunities to express deep parts of me, in ways I cannot say or think. Access to the swirling unconscious. Mostly, this has been en masse. Rave culture. Club couture. Ecstatic experience. Adventures on and off-the-grid seeking places of durational dance delivery. Long swims beneath normal thresholds of sensorial immersion. Dissipation and unification. Spontaneity, joy and acceptance. These dancefloors are wild and sacred.

I first disappeared into a loud new world of lasers and power beats back in the early 00s. My bestie and I debuted at London's labyrinthine Fabric club. That summer we expanded our nocturnal landscape across the capital. Weekends were spread with the cream of the drum & bass scene. Super-fast drum kicks moved our frames, heavy bass lines led our hips in gravelly swirls, topnotes of melody and groove kept us playful and light. MCs engaged the crowd with their patter. Sonic cycles were built and released all night. We were unequivocally there to move; five hours was a healthy minimum.

Since then, I discovered ecstatic dance too. Modern forms take their cues from 5Rhythms developed by Gabrielle Roth in the late 1970s, a practice that sits in an arena encompassing the likes of Biodanza and sober rave. These experiences have enabled me to get into elated states on water, deep breaths and early nights.

Zero judgement, and sooo much more space than your average dancefloor. The oceanic fluidity felt in these environs has vastly expanded my movement repertoire, and provided therapy from some of the short sharp shocks of daily city life.

In the last few years I've made the transition into DJing, trained as an ecstatic dance facilitator myself, and started making music, all organic progression for me as a deep lover of music and dance.

Then came coronavirus.

Virtual skanking: get down in lockdown

As quarantine prevented human huddles and IRL dance parties, many of us tuned into URLs. Entering the endless cavern of online possibility, I've tried a few virtual varieties. The need has been high: to cut loose, shake off confinement sludge, power-up my working-from-home body with oxygen, and get MOVING in a world shrunken by phantom geographical cordons.

I've moved in ways I wouldn't have otherwise, with people across seas I wouldn't have danced with. I joined an Instagram Live with Pia Love, a dancer friend based in Puerto Rico, who led a fierce swishing and swirling class channelling the orisha Oya. I grooved through the chakras with a Canadian crew of my mate's Mum and her ladies in Vancouver, while she tuned in from Cape Town. Plus informal musical hangouts, live performances, a morning rave, party parties, and more live streams than I can remember.

This is what I've learnt so far.

Photo: Baptiste MG / Unsplash



> The need has been high: to cut loose, shake off confinement sludge, power up my working-from-home body with oxygen

Better than nothing

First of all, it's better than nought, right? In these strange-indeed times, there has been an urgency to use tech not just for work meetings, but also to create, play and move. Online dance parties provide a musical moment to see familiar and new faces, dress up and feel fruity.

Move it move it therapy

All intentional dance sessions represent a window of time you've created to move. I've enjoyed shaking it down, smiling widely in happy dazes. It still amazes me just how powerful dance is. An instant energy shaker and vibe changer. This feedback is exactly what I heard from mates after bouncing around our living rooms to my virtual Wild Women retreat playlist: Haven't danced in ages. Exactly what I needed! The power of dance as therapy and alchemy still belongs to us, no matter what.

Social bounce

We are a social species. Dancing together can dramatically amplify the energy we feel and lead us into lands of collective experience. We can literally bounce off each other's smiles and moves, giddily playful in the moment. Online, these interactions are more limited – but still very much there.



> **Our own image seems to hold endless captivation, especially in a pouting selfie age**

We've been framed: selfie mode

It's hard not to just end up watching yourself, isn't it? Our own image seems to hold endless captivation, especially in a pouting selfie age. The equivalent of dancing in a mirror during an online sesh can make us both extra-exhibitionist and self-conscious. More thoughts are trained on how we look on screen. Whereas the only mirrors IRL are usually above washbasins.

Zoomlight: here's looking at YOU!

Zoom features like Speaker or Gallery View, with the ability of organisers to spotlight people, firmly dish out limelight. All eyes on YOU (oh hello!) is enough to instantly crack coy smiles and make you dance harder. More akin perhaps – in real-life – to high visibility spots like in front of the DJ or up on a podium of sorts.

Party POV: box vista

The party horizon before us has drastically changed: from 360-degree, free-range wanderings, to being placed in uniform boxes looking at other boxes whilst we pace our own four walls.

Insta-Streamlandia

URL mode is a transportation convenience yet an adventure sucker. Thanks to the World Wide Web, you're (instantly) already there! Averting early overtures of transit, queues and security, you are granted instant access to the domain which electronic music platform Resident Advisor dubbed 'Streamland'.

Short(er) circuits

A 'proper dance' for me is at least five hours. Plus on-top time to take in the experience, chill, wonder and wander. Ecstatic dances tend to clock up 90–120 minutes, which

is still decent. URL dance falls short. They tend to be energetic bursts rather than deep sensorial voyages. I miss those extra hours.

Testing technicals

Normally, venues and promoters come with tech experts. People who know how to work the wires and tame the machines, lights and sound. Unseen and unbilled, these black-clothed (ungendered) knights of the night are easy to take for granted – but they are vital. Ask any exasperated live streamer turned DIY techie.

Heard before seen: sonic systems

Quality of sound is paramount. You want to feel the music viscerally (without the unwanted bonus of tinnitus). But home-based dancing is reliant on the daisy chain of devices, gear and networks along the www way, including (crucially) your sound system and The Connection. That's a lot of variables. Then there's your housemates and neighbours to be mindful of, as your hand hovers over the volume knob... In a native club environment, those are just not your issues.

Cam couture in your imagination station

Zoom's virtual background and green screen options give the visually-minded a chance to swap scenes of domestic mishmash for more (aspirational) space-filling utopia. Novices can use Zoom's pre-set images to macro hone in on beaded blades of grass, traverse the expanse of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, or fly up to space to gaze back at the Earth's curvature. But the more adventurous take it up levels, often visual-jockeying with art and political statements.

Dressing the set

It's not just the virtual background you can change. How about customising your home? Extra visual flourishes include lighting, projectors, props and pets. Who doesn't like a dose of remote fluffy pet therapy? As a colour freak myself, coloured lights and UV keep me happy after dusk. Some people, of course, don't have the kit or give a hoot about these extra visual flourishes, but for those who do, it's enjoyable to see the creative investment cash out in vibe dividends.

Spatial strain: wild style or domestic miss

On IRL dancefloors, space is a moveable feast. Sometimes you can roam around in search of 'your spot', only to find it's suddenly become a traffic junction of drifting hoards. In short, clubs can get packed. Ecstatic floors tend to be more roomy. With domestic dance, the spatial territory depends on your situ. Maybe it permits wild-style flailing and spinning. But what if your flatmate is working from home in the lounge when you want a big prance, and you end up confined to your so-called 'double' bedroom? Space-pressed city-dwellers will identify.

Me, en masse

Raves and ecstatic dancing are all about individual expression and mass experience. The online environment of assembling en masse in individual windows is, for all its differences, a parallel structure. But other forms of social dancing – couples dancing, folk dances – have more rules and roles, which don't migrate so well from IRL to URL.

What if your flatmate is working from home in the lounge when you want a big prance?

> Can tech-first presence ever be enough for our highly social human species?

Limited feelback and deathly disconnect

DJing is just not the same. Views of the crowd are less than satisfactory. Playing at Riposte Virtual #2, despite my flatmate doing a sterling job as a backup dancer, I felt super disconnected. Peeping a few bodies in blocks is far far from the felt bodily presence of those around you. The sensual shortcomings of URL dances are chasmic, and deeply felt. I miss dancing in real life. With real people.

Dancing into the future...

My whirl through digital dance has provided much-needed reprieve during quarantine, but connecting online through The Connection will never square up to the real thing. I wonder if tech-first presence can ever be enough for our highly social human species, no matter how many potential visions of the future are broadcast to our screens.

I've realised just how much space is a luxury, especially in crowded cities. Spatial quality and availability matters, for physical, social and mental health. Safe spaces to have formative dance experiences in are truly hallowed ground.

Fight for your right to party

One thing is for sure: dance holds immense power. Let us not take its freedom and healing potential – on all levels – for granted.

Rave was built on principles of community, and contributed hugely to notions – and experiences – of both collective unity and personal expression. Ecstatic dance is a way of achieving freedom through the body, a moving statement of embodiment and enjoyment of our physical bodies. In these entranced states we enter potentialities of deep energetic transformation on many levels. For many, dance is a prayer and movement medicine.

Eternal flame

Dance is not restricted to the floors that are licensed and sanctioned for our consumption. Dance is wherever we are, an eternal flame of transformative power within reach.

That flame flickers online too – but what does the future hold? Early IRL parties are slowly bubbling back, often with dancefloors laid out in 2-metre socially distanced squares. Even off screen, it seems we may be dancing in boxes for a while longer yet.

And with many venues and promoters facing hard times after this deserted chapter, it will take baby steps, innovative thinking and solid backing to get us all up on our party feet.

But alongside the re-opening of 3D spaces, the online trend seems set to last, with both digital-first and hybrid organisers likely to continue interacting with their newly formed international communities. Plus the expected growth of XR, as modes of reality get mixed.

Me? I look forward to shocking out on the dancefloor again, and playing for real people soon. No doubt, we will all be appreciative – to a whole new degree – of those who hold and create space for our dance.

Power to Our Dance, in all its virtual and potential realities. •



Eden Topall-Rabanes (front left) and Cath Carver (centre) at Riposte London

From place to space: Riposte London / Riposte Virtual

Eden Topall-Rabanes tells Cath Carver about moving his dance party online

I began Riposte club in France about 12 years ago, as a cross between an art exhibition and a party. After I moved to London, it evolved into a kind of queer techno art rave. We usually have around four DJs and maybe 10 to 15 performers and 10 to 15 visual artists, and we're also involved in art and activism.

During quarantine, we hosted three virtual Riposte events, and I went to other online parties too. There were both positives and negatives to the experience. On the plus side, it was of course a way of keeping connected to our existing local community, but it was also really beautiful and heartwarming to reach other people globally – strangers, as well as people I knew, artists as well as clubbers. During the party when everyone is in front of their screens, it can be easier to chat with new people who you think are cool, or interesting, or cute. You can send private messages, and everyone has their Instagram up. All that was great.

I think the online space can be more accessible too. I've seen parties with sign language, and audio or visual descriptions, for example, and for people who are on the spectrum, it's easier for them to avoid sensory overload.

It's definitely cheaper for people! You don't pay for drinks at a bar, and most online parties don't have an entry fee. But that also means we make less money.

I've noticed that online there are a few big parties getting most of the attention, but overall there aren't so many parties. It's the same with DJs: a few get lots of work and others almost nothing. For performers, I notice a lot of drag queens but almost no other type of performers.

Privacy and safety are issues. You don't know who might be screen recording, so you never have the same freedom of going 'tits out' like you can in a club. Once, we got invaded by homophobes being abusive in the chat. We kicked them out super-quick, but it was scary.

After the party, you know, there's something so sad about just closing the computer, being drunk and alone, and just going to bed.

I'm really not sure we will continue the format when we can have live events again. But we are definitely looking at learning from the experience to integrate online and live action more, for example with camera feeds, and using more digital technology in the physical space.

Being together apart
The hollowing of the post-quarantine public

Anastasio Koukoutas
17 August 2020

A public performance 'practice' in Athens responded to the coronavirus crisis – but did 'The Crater' rethink or recreate its underlying conditions?

Following the unprecedented lockdown due to the coronavirus outbreak, performance artists and more specifically dancers were faced with the irreducible and urgent question: 'what to do with our bodies?'

When our way of 'being in the world' – as our bodies verify – is considered a possible enemy that we have to constantly guard and neutralise in fear of viral dissemination, then the above question is not only philosophically valid but also a reminder that our bodies are political entities, whose project of 'immunising' society – often propagated as an individual responsibility or even as a matter of utmost national importance – called for a re-examination of human expressiveness and touch.

As Paul B. Preciado mentioned in his essay 'Learning from the virus', there are no politics that are not body politics. Though his statement was a critique of new forms of governmental power that were setting aside democratic values in the name of public health, it was quite amazing how fast our bodies were turned into invigilators – both subjects and objects in the management of the pandemic.

In Greece, a country already burdened with years of economic crisis – most visible in sectors such as the public health system, education and culture – the virus has widened and deepened existing inequalities. Actors, dancers, musicians and other performing arts workers were introduced to dystopian scenarios concerning the future – and maybe the utility – of their craft: by prioritising health over aesthetic experience and any form of political dialogue, their bodies were turned into fragile links, their labour stripped of its value, reduced to something 'temporarily unnecessary'. If performing arts are considered a useless luxury (to paraphrase Georges Bataille) then it is not necessity, but rather this notion of luxury that can help us understand the fundamental problems of our society and the ultimate goal of learning to be (in this) together.

But what does 'together' mean in the times of social distancing? And how could we perceive arts when sociopolitical priorities are capsized, turning arts into Bataille's 'accursed share'? Searching for a way to respond to the suspension of all cultural activities even after the quarantine (indoor theatres and most arts venues remain shut to this day), a group of artists – mostly dancers – came up with the idea of 'The Crater'. The initiative was something like an 'active relay of presence' (as the initiators stated in their open call), that would last for at least five days (it eventually lasted 15 days; the idea also spread to other cities, including Thessaloniki, Ioannina and Komotini).

Situated in Syntagma Square, right across from the Greek parliament, the location was both symbolic and practical: it's a busy spot during rush hours but also laden with



Woman dancing in 'The Crater', a performance practice in Athens, 2020
Photo © Chrysanthi Badek

political confrontation from the last decade of protests and demonstrations. The Crater, an invisible square known to everyone who would participate in this round-the-clock public 'practice' (the group wanted to avoid any resonance with either protests or artistic performances), was kept alive only due to the participants' commitment and wakeful desire. For a single hour, a person would enter this imaginary square within the Square and she/he would respond to the surroundings with an improvised 'dance'. Keeping things as simple as possible, this gesture was more about bringing into focus the proximity of dance/movement and public space and how, under social distancing directives, that proximity has been torn apart. However, the initiative seemed free of any persuasive rhetoric: its playfulness and interactive vigour with the flow of people crossing the selected spot, as well as its contemplative presence during early morning hours when Syntagma Square was dormant, turned these hour-long 'dances' into a collective practice of appearance for performer-artists whom post-quarantine restrictions have made 'invisible'.

The shared misfortune of having no occupation for an indefinite period of time and being unjustly declassified as art workers by the Greek Ministry of Culture, made this public gesture overtly political. The weakening of any political action situated in public space in 'post-Covid' days – a threat so palpable in any



Performer, onlookers and passers-by in Syntagma Square, Athens, 2020
Photo © Chrysanthi Badek

form of protest and confrontation – also connoted a certain disqualification of the art worker's body: if performing on stage was made impossible, could public space be reclaimed as a possible 'stage', a shared space for exposing one's precarity as an art worker, an opportunity to make one's opacity into a productive counter-dialogue? Is 'dancing in the streets' still an evidence of unsettling communal desire or an inspiring gesture to mourn one's identity as an art-worker? Or has any implication of communalism and active political involvement turned once and for all into – to use Eva Illouz's term – an 'emodity'?

As days went by and dancer-artists kept showing up in The Crater aiming at an amplified public awareness – be it momentary or virtual, as photos of the event were gradually flooding various social media platforms – another crucial topic reached the surface: is there still 'space' in the public sphere, to discuss productively the fundamental notions of collectivism and pluralism? In other words, could an event such as The Crater retain its political significance through time, 'keep the candle lit' without fading into the narcissistic trap of sharing oneself in public for the sake of self-promotion? Perceived initially as an

event of spontaneous fervour, focused on the frail relation between artists' precarious conditions and the inadequate state policies, The Crater also risked the misinterpretation of making public appearance a self-contained statement by encouraging the performer's competence and likeableness on social media.

Despite its political relevance and proclaimed spirit of collectivism, the project also testified to the persistent mystification of individual presence within the artistic and social realm. If the pandemic made our 'being together' problematic, it also made apparent that subjectivity is capitalism's biggest output, and that the reopening of public space after quarantine would not automatically bring an analogous openness in how individuals inhabit, participate or shape the public sphere. Just think of the numerous videos shared daily during quarantine in the absence of 'real life': this uninhibited exposure appraised individualism as the source of an insatiable creativity. It doesn't matter what you are doing as long as you present yourself doing it. From cooking to working out, from DIY instructions to political satire, individuals have proved to be a driving force in the hardcore neoliberal 'economy of the self'. Applying the above to the sociopolitical field and the backlash the virus has had for any kind of public performance that expresses collective needs and concerns, also demands a re-examination of art within the public sphere.

It is a mistake to consider the public as an empty canvas for one's creativity, or as a collection of individuals in a shared space. What makes public space urgently political in times of social distancing are the conflicting interests between artists/individuals and the state. Artistic practice, therefore, should not solely aim for creativity and emotive experience but rather for a reorganisation of human relations in the given moment. The idea of a body confined into its own way of doing, of sharing, of producing material that strongly identifies as dancey, beautiful and poetic – a stance also affirmed by the captions of the images shared on social media – reveals the persistent beliefs and values inscribed in the artists' bodies: values functioning as an unconscious modus operandi for expressing, experiencing, perceiving oneself publicly. Hence a concatenation of questions arises: how do we appear in public? How do we stand up for plurality while being overtly obsessed with singularity? How can we be together apart?

As the attention shifted from political debate and the urgency to address concerns publicly, The Crater was gradually reduced to a 'show', or even became what it aimed to avoid in the first place: an artistic performance predicated on what registers artistically as commonsense and valuable. If 'luxury' is a term used to demarcate the excessive, then art as luxury could only be found in the latter's 'uselessness'. In other words, we didn't need to be convinced of the bodies' utility and value to legitimise what those bodies defended in public. What we needed was to question that legitimacy as the only way to approve the public existence of those bodies, to recognise their desire to be seen and speak for themselves, whether dancing or not. •

How do we stand up for plurality while being obsessed with singularity?

Unknown waters

Berlin's Tanz im August after Covid



Emily May
25 August 2020

Tanz im August director Virve Sutinen on rethinking the festival for post-pandemic times

Jaamil Olawale Kosoko in *Chameleon*
Photo © Sarah Griffith

In March 2020, Virve Sutinen, artistic director of Berlin's Tanz im August festival, flew to Helsinki. Within a few days, she received a text message telling her that she would have to go into quarantine for two weeks. 'At that point, I understood that the situation was not good,' says Sutinen, sitting in Tanz im August's public festival library at the front of the currently closed Hebbel am Ufer (HAU2) theatre. 'I'm experienced enough to know to always prepare for the worst – it's a trait of Finnish people,' she adds, smiling – though surely even Finns would not have imagined that 'the worst' for this year's Tanz im August would be a global pandemic.

Founded in 1983 under the shadow of the Berlin Wall, Tanz im August is an annual contemporary dance festival showcasing works by both international and local, renowned and emerging choreographers. With this year's original programme promising four weeks of performances

> At that point, I understood that the situation was not good

from the likes of William Forsythe, Boris Charmatz, Geumhyung Jeong, and Milla Koistinen, the festival had to be completely rethought to adhere to governmental safety restrictions.

Now condensed into a 10-day 'Special Edition', Tanz im August is one of the latest performing arts organisations to experiment with the online festival format. They are, however, also venturing outside, including outdoor performances and public screenings. 'We didn't want to just stream live performances or videos of dance works, and there were two reasons for that,' says Sutinen. 'The first was that we thought by August people would have watched so many streams that they would be tired of it. And the second was that live performance is the capital of our artists. It is what, when this is over, they will continue to work with. We didn't want to just flaunt all of their material on the internet.'

Instead, Tanz im August offered its already contracted artists the possibility of working closely with the festival to create bespoke works for the new format. 'Sometimes there are hierarchical issues that make dialogues between different parties different, but this time we were all in the same boat. It was very comforting to come together at this moment to try and work things out. Even if it was over Zoom, those talks were extremely important to all of us.'

Many of the newly commissioned works on the festival lineup are dance films, ranging from a documentary following the life of renowned performer Louise Lecavalier to a behind-the-scenes look at the development of Argentinian choreographer Ayelen Parolin's latest piece Weg. 'The film gives audiences a very rare chance to see the choreographic process,' says Sutinen. 'It's quite fascinating to see how they started and where they ended up with it. I hope this promotes a greater understanding of what goes into making a dance work. Of course it can be enjoyable, but it is a really gradual process and it takes a lot of time and research to be able to put things together. This isn't always obvious when you watch a performance.'

Other films take a more political approach, such as Urban Feminism – which follows ten female urban choreographers on a journey around Berlin – and About questions, shames, and scars by Brazilian choreographer Alice Ripoll/Cia REC. Addressing injustice in her home country and how cultural life is being destroyed under Bolsonaro's right-wing government, the film forms part of an evening of video performances and critical discussions titled Brazil Hijacked – the fourth instalment of Tanz im August 2020's Happy to Listen talk series.

Other relevant talking points that the festival will tackle – both through Happy to Listen and dance performances themselves – include indigenous perspectives on art and activism and anti-ableist futures. Recent developments in the Black Lives Matter movement are alluded to in American Chameleon: The Living Installments (2.0) a 'virtual meeting place' by Nigerian-American artist and poet Jaamil Olawale Kosoko. Designed using the gaming and chat app Discord, the online interactive

performance aims to be a 'flexible space in which black people can feel comfortable when they raise their voices to think and speak out loud'.

It's no surprise this year's Tanz im August is so politically charged: the turbulent times we find ourselves in are fertile ground for creative analysis. 'We always do a lot of things to facilitate meetings between artists and audiences, and provoke questions around how to look at dance, how to enjoy it, how it can be fuel for debate, and how it's connected to the world outside,' says Sutinen. She does note though that this year's online format combined with the unprecedented levels of global upheaval have pushed Tanz im August to be more critical than usual. 'It's obvious that there are a lot of problems in the world and in our industry. The old solutions don't really work, so we need to shift our focus somehow.'

have been reaching out to them may not have been versatile enough. The new practice of presenting things online means that resources are available for people who are housebound. The online is global. It can also be looked at in places where there is very little dance.' The festival's physical magazine, containing artist interviews and think pieces, will also be distributed globally. 'After watching everything on a screen, your eyes are sore. It's nice to have a magazine that you can feel and smell,' Sutinen adds, picking one up and leafing through the pages. 'I see it as a gift.'

Audience participation is a key element of this year's festival. From dance legend William Forsythe's Untitled Instructional Series to American choreographer Faye Driscoll's Guided Choreography for the Living and Dead, many of the works invite audience members to follow choreographic

> I wonder if concepts relying on local participation will be more relevant if we cannot travel as we used to



Main photo: Still from *Urban Feminism*
© Pao Paniq / Shuto Crew

Inset: From William Forsythe's *Untitled Instructional Series*
Photo © Dajana Lothert

One example of this shift is recognising the greater need for accessibility to dance festivals. Sutinen notes that while they already have had a strong focus on engagement and reaching outside their normal audiences, 'the ways in which we

instructions and become part of the works themselves. 'Both of these pieces lower the threshold between what is an everyday moment and what is considered the high art of dance. They help to demystify the difference between the two,' says Sutinen,

before musing, ‘I wonder if in the future, the kind of concepts in which artists are relying on local participation will be more relevant if we cannot travel as we used to.’

While this would be an interesting development, she does hope that Tanz im August 2020 will get people excited to see live dance when theatres are allowed to reopen. ‘I wonder what the absence of arts in our lives will do to us. I hope it makes it clear how much depends on it. Not only culturally, politically, but also economically. This is a little weird economy, it keeps people alive and working and creating. It creates all kinds of things without which I think we would be much, much poorer and less innovative.’

Looking to the future, if the global pandemic continues for much longer, arts organisations such as Tanz im August will need to consider how they move forward with operations long-term. Sutinen hopes the sector will approach this endeavour together. ‘The arts sector has become aware of how important it is to collaborate rather than compete,’ she says, explaining that Tanz im August has since April been part of an informal focus group where European festivals share information and discuss their approaches to the global pandemic. ‘I think good things, such as this, come out of every situation. From every catastrophe we can learn something new.’ Still, she thinks it is too soon to say what exactly these lessons will be. ‘After the festival, we will reflect with artists and audiences about what worked and what didn’t. For now, we are in unknown waters.’ •



Local leads the way
Pelzverkehr Festival, Austria

Claire Lefèvre
27 August 2020

The Covid crisis is shifting focus from the international to the regional – but festivals such as Pelzverkehr have already been there for years

Klagenfurt, Austria
www.festivalpelzverkehr.at

The global Covid crisis has forced the art sector to reset and rethink: many large institutions specialised in international exchange have suddenly been compelled to 'go local', gearing towards community engagement and sustainable modes of travel. Regional festivals on the other hand, have been working in such conditions for years. Challenged by economic precarity and lack of institutional support, artistic directors like Ingrid Türk-Chlapek from Pelzverkehr Festival have become specialised in sustainable practices and audience outreach.

Founded in 2016, Pelzverkehr is based in the town of Klagenfurt, in the Carinthia region of Austria. For some, the idea of curating a dance festival in the middle of the Austrian countryside might seem ill-fated, but for Türk-Chlapek 'this geographical position is a treasure'. At the crossroads of the burgeoning Ljubljana dance scene in Slovenia and a growing contemporary dance field in Italy, Klagenfurt blossoms once a year into an oasis for dance and performance, with artists from Carinthia as well as guests from across the Alps-Adriatic region.

This focus on local artists and audience has certainly been influenced by financial limitations, but also by a deep desire to tap into the vibrancy of the region. 'I always knew that we didn't have enough money to invite people from all over the world but I also didn't want to. Of course it is a big plus that it's good for the environment, now more than ever, but I always wanted to do it like this. Because the region is rich!'

Though more and more artists choose to stop commuting by plane amidst the health crisis and climate catastrophes, bringing a wide variety of performances to rural areas also saves local audiences from having to travel far and wide to access artistic content. Challenging the cliché of the peripheral festival, Türk-Chlapek doesn't shy away from programming complex and thought-provoking works. Yodelling naked men (Simon Mayer), body activist clowns (Silvia Gribaudi) and classic queer movies (Ulrike Ottinger) all coexist in Pelzverkehr: 'I want to show that also in Klagenfurt, it is possible to go beyond conservative and conventional formats. It's also part of the city's identity.'

Enticed by her bold choices as well as her ingenious approach to audience outreach, a growing number of guests look forward to Pelzverkehr Festival every year. From making site-specific works a central part of the programme, to organising artist talks, outdoors workshops and parties, Pelzverkehr implanted itself in the city by reaching out of the black box. For Türk-Chlapek 'the involvement of the local population is simply a must' and while admittedly, the local contemporary dance scene is small, 'there is a substantial community of tango, flamenco and urban



Une joie secrète (2019), a film by Jérôme Cassou on Nadia Vadori-Gauthier's *Une minute de danse par jour* (Pelzverkehr 2020). Photo © Nadia Haussman

dancers with whom we always try to collaborate during the festival'. Instead of high-handed research into how to reach the 'real' people, her tactics are down to earth and effective: from 424 spectators in 2016, the amount of guests had almost tripled by 2019.

'I try to talk to people in the audience before the performance starts. I go to them and I say hello, nice that you're here, and how did you hear about the festival? After the performance I ask them what they thought because I'm really interested. I also encourage the "regulars" to go see things that are less comfortable for them and to question what they feel.'

While no one questions the significance of the festival, its future is still uncertain and the lack of solid infrastructure reveals the precarity of Türk-Chlapek's work and her legacy: it is evident how much of the success of the festival relies on the organiser's passion and grit, and how little it is due to actual structural support. 'As I get older, I'm thinking of ways to separate the festival from my own personality. I would like to pass it on, but at the moment no one else will do it in these conditions.'

More than just locally relevant, the importance of regional festivals is crucial to the ecology of the Austrian and European scene as a whole: it is vital for artists to have platforms to tour their work in decent conditions. Türk-Chlapek denounces the wastefulness of the current funding system: 'I'm against the policy of getting money for a production and showing it only three or five times. It's not sustainable and totally capitalist, putting the artists in a position of perpetual production. One should be able to live from a piece by touring for at least a year before having to think of making another work.'

So here comes the less sexy side of sustainability, beyond eco-friendly travels and local engagement: the responsibility to update and reinvent ways of working relies once more on individual willingness to change behaviours, while deep structural change lags behind. We can learn myriads of tricks from dedicated organisers like Ingrid Türk-Chlapek, and be inspired by the compelling way they enrich the ecology of the dance scene, but there is also an urgent need to invest and support local festivals if we want to reach a thriving, creative and sustainable future. •

Forward steps

David Pallant
01 September 2020

Rather than longing for the past, some dance artists are using the pandemic crisis to imagine other futures for performance

Earlier this year, Angela Alves, a performer, artist and activist based in Berlin, was due to start the creation of her newest work when lockdown descended. Perhaps surprisingly, she was relieved. 'For me, it was a gift,' she recalls. 'I was having an MS relapse, I didn't know how I would even be able to walk to the studio. So to have the opportunity to make a remote performance from home was perfect.'

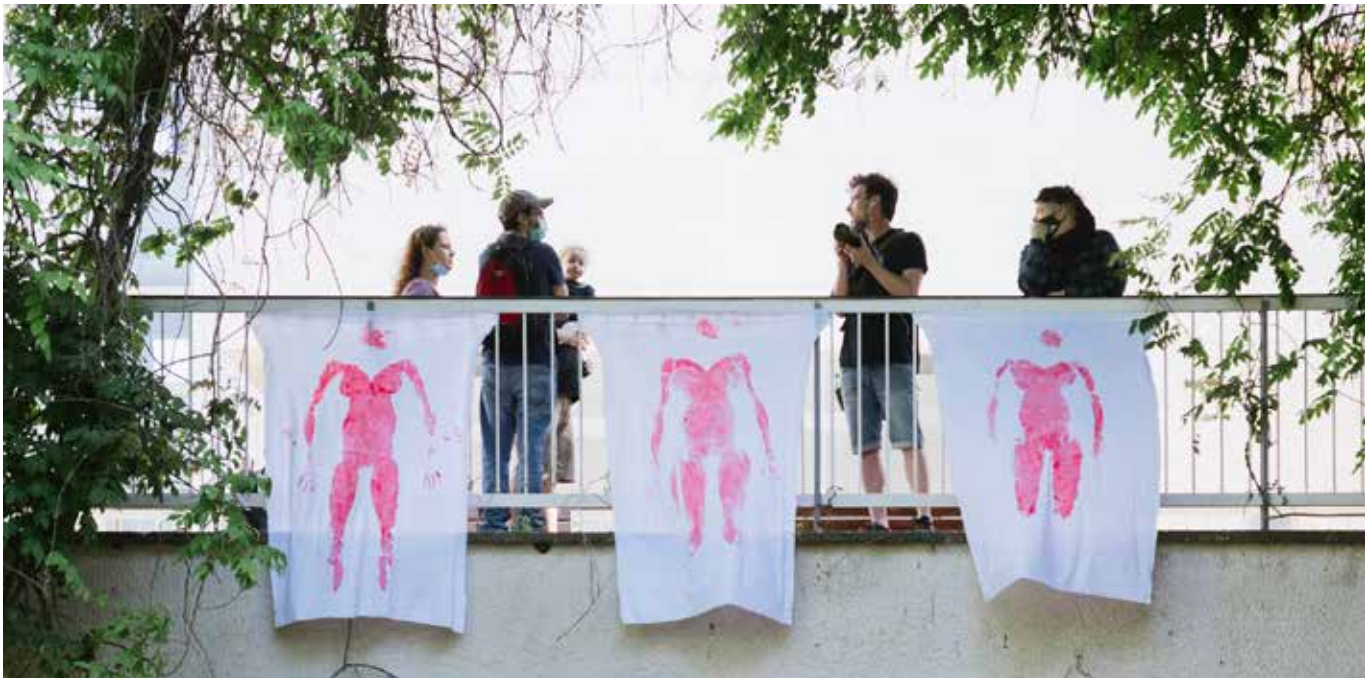
As soon as the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the optimists among us began to imagine the positive change it might bring – a reshaping of the global political order perhaps, or an environmental revolution. Most agreed, however, that it was an unmitigated crisis for the performing arts, decimated overnight by the banning of public gatherings. Yet five months on, and some dance artists are already sifting through the wreckage to find new questions to put to their audiences, and new ways of asking them.

The piece Alves ended up creating from home, *No Limit*, had its June premiere via Zoom, and proposed a world in which disabled people are the majority and the norm. For most of us, being consigned to our homes with no choice but to participate online was a strange, novel experience, yet for others it was nothing new.

'For decades the crip community [those identifying as belonging to or allied with the disability community] has been fighting for remote access,' says Alves, 'because, for various reasons, some people cannot come to the theatre.' Lockdown meant that, for the first time, those disparate experiences were brought together on a large scale, something which Alves sees as essential. 'It is really dangerous to separate remote accessibility from what is viewed as the "real thing", because that way the people benefiting from it remain out of sight; we make them a conveniently invisible part of our society. Yet if I had proposed a remote performance pre-Covid-19, it would never have been funded – online accessibility is still so undervalued, it is seen as a poor substitute.'

Perhaps that will change. Recently, time has seemed to give up all pretence at solidity, bending and warping differently around each of us, and those who have felt as though life was on pause might be eager for a return to 'normality'. Yet for some who are fighting for progress, the remote is set to fast forward. 'This is our time,' beams Alves. 'We need to shout it from the rooftops that remote performance is great for people with disabilities. It's a different experience, of course, but that is how diversity works!'

Online performance is not the only pandemic-proof way dance artists have found to reach their audience. In *I'm Here*, Israeli choreographer Yasmeen Godder posted fabric, paint and an instructional video to participants, and invited them to make a body print in the privacy of their



Bodies and body prints in Yasmeen Godder's *I'm Here*. Photo © Dor Kedmi

own home. 'It was an exhibition of Ana Mendieta's work which served as my first inspiration,' explains Godder. 'Seeing videos of Mendieta's actions, so intimate yet so loaded, I was drawn to the idea of creating a personal ritual, emphasising the experience over the product or the object created.'

The recent rise of the home environment as a performance venue has led to concerns that contemporary dance will become yet another thing to be offered up for convenient consumption, or reduced to background noise. Yet bringing work into the audience's home does break down theatrical hierarchies between performer and spectator – doubly so, if the audience are also the performers. This democratisation of dance through engaging the 'untrained' bodies of an audience is an interest which has run through many of Godder's recent creations. 'My previous work with people dealing with Parkinson's disease opened up a whole other world for me,' says Godder. 'I realised I could learn a huge amount about movement from different bodies which are experts in their own human experience. By connecting I'm Here to individual sensation, I wanted to welcome the subjective experience of each person's body into the work.'

Godder, like everyone, is also having to rethink what it means to congregate. In *I'm Here*, she hung the body prints in a public garden in Tel Aviv, and participants soon began communicating among themselves on social media, as well as openly sharing their experiences online. 'The ritual was made to be performed in private, but shared and celebrated publicly,' says Godder, 'and it ended up being a great way of

making intimate connections between strangers right after a period of isolation.'

Few dance artists would argue that real life, physical contact between people can or should be replaced. However, by acknowledging the diversity of her audience's bodies, Godder wants to continue exploring even more diverse ways of engaging them: 'I believe that the knowledge we have in the dance world can still have new, unexpected outcomes. So when it comes to connecting people through creative practices, I want to think more freely, and more wildly!'

In some countries, the doors of conventional performance spaces are already tentatively reopening, offering what is perhaps an early glimpse into the future of live performance. And the future is exactly where *Transhuman Hai*, one of the first dance pieces to be performed live in post-lockdown Berlin, set its sights. Created by Porson's Khashoggi, a duo consisting of Xeni Alexandrou and Andrea Rama, the work deals with transhumanism, a belief that the human body and mind will evolve through the use of technology. In the midst of a pandemic defined by the fragility of the human body, with many hopes pinned on technological solutions, it seems a timely subject.

Unlike much science fiction, *Transhuman Hai* offers an abstract vision of the future which is rooted in the past, with human hybrids represented by a mermaid and 'futuristic' music from the 1980s. As Rama slithered in his fishtail, somehow painfully human, Alexandrou walked among rows of human-shaped cut-outs, reciting Latin.

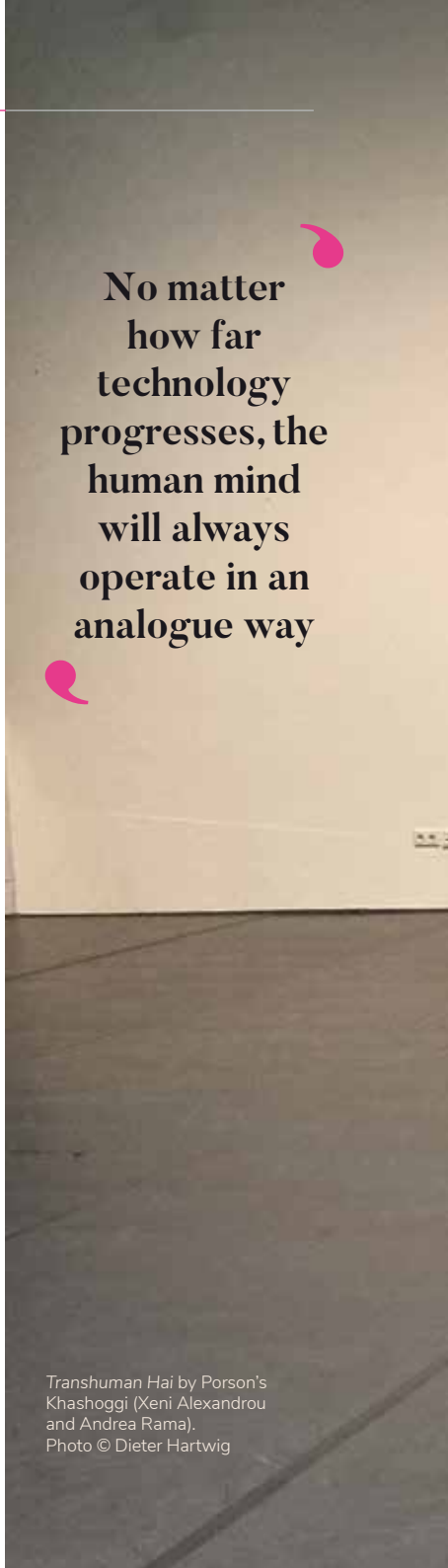
'No matter how far technology progresses, the human mind will always operate in an analogue way' explains Alexandrou. 'That's why we tried to keep everything analogue in this work.'

During lockdown, as we watched dancing bodies flattened and minimised onto our laptop screens, technology did not always feel like a panacea. 'Watching these documentation recordings of previous performances is a bit like eating canned food in an emergency,' says Rama. 'We used to say that art was ahead of society,' adds Alexandrou, 'now technology is. But so far, the digitalisation of many performances has not been a progression, it has been a limitation.'

While the integration of dance into the digital sphere will presumably advance beyond those quick-fix uploads, it seems as though, in its gradual return, live dance performance will itself be unavoidably marked by its recent absence. 'Real life involvement has become an obsession recently,' says Alexandrou, 'and we feel audiences wanting a different way to connect. Patience seems more limited. If we make a performance where somebody only moves every ten minutes, for example, we have to do it with an awareness that we've just lived through a time of huge restriction.'

It is little wonder that audiences are re-entering theatres transformed; the impact of the pandemic on the public body is already tangible. As we sit on a train for the first time in months, or decide whether to hug a friend, bodies are taking on a radical new significance. Are they a risk? Are they

No matter how far technology progresses, the human mind will always operate in an analogue way



Transhuman Hai by Porson's Khashoggi (Xeni Alexandrou and Andrea Rama). Photo © Dieter Hartwig

at risk? Do we miss their touch, their nearness? A single cough is now enough to make an entire train carriage stiffen or recoil – if that bodily hypersensitivity can exist within our daily lives, what effect might the performative body, in full-transmission mode and intentionally tuned to spark a reaction, now be able to have?

While venues grapple with the practical aspects of a return to live performance, dance artists may have to redefine what it means to create with and for bodies in the times of Covid. 'Things have changed' says Alexandrou. 'We cannot trace yet in exactly which way, but we must engage with it.' •



To sit or not to sit?
The question of movement direction

Suzanne Frost
17 September 2020

What do movement directors do? A new collection of interviews shines a light on an overlooked craft

Movement Directors in Contemporary Theatre: Conversations on Craft by Ayse Tashkiran, published by Methuen Drama in the Theatre Makers series

Six months after leaving my dance career, I sat in a rehearsal room as a fresh dramaturgy intern and witnessed an actress clash dramatically with a director. He was telling her to sit on a specific chair, stage left, and she simply couldn't imagine her character behaving that way. She couldn't find the intention behind that action. She didn't feel it. My dance brain felt like doing an eye-roll – 'for God's sake, just sit!' – but my new dramaturg brain observed, trying to understand. In hindsight, what could have unlocked this particular rehearsal room would have been a movement director.

Since coronavirus restrictions have confined us to our homes, the eyes of eager dance enthusiasts may have wandered over to other art forms to get their fix of entertainment – Netflix, streamed online theatre, the careful choreography of political press briefings – but the attentive observer will of course notice that movement is everywhere. Movement is a huge part of human life and communication; anyone in the business of storytelling, who wants to touch people and make them react, cannot bypass the body. Watching other bodies move directly affects us in our own bodies. Mirror neurones ignite real physical responses in the audience. The power to generate kinaesthetic empathy is dance's greatest strength and a storytelling tool that should be a no-brainer for directors to use.

The late, great Sir Ken Robinson often spoke about dance being the least respected art form, the 'posterchild for underestimating something hugely important'. It is indeed baffling that while countless studies have shown human communication to be largely non-verbal, so many people feel uncomfortable about or avoid using their bodies. In British theatre, the word is king. The script is sacred and Shakespeare is a national treasure (and Shakespeare bothered very little with what people do on stage while they speak). Actors have voice coaches and accent coaches and learn projection, but sometimes neglect their body as a communicating tool. In opera, world-famous singers are still allowed (luckily, less and less) to walk up to the ramp and deliver their aria, a peak emotional moment within the story, completely static. This produces a disconnect between the emotion an audience hears about in words and the physical cues they observe from the body in front of them. They don't match. We are not, after all, 'amorphous, floating brains' (Sir Ken again) who happen to be hosted by a body; we are creatures who experience the world as we do because we have a body – indeed, because we are bodies.

For actors, the body and physical movement can be hugely important keys towards unlocking and developing their characters, and it is tremendously interesting how their work can differ from a dancer's. While dancers are generally used to copying



Above: Movement direction by Kate Flatt for Phyllida Lloyd's production of *Peter Grimes*, Opera North (UK). Photo © Robert Workman

and remembering a routine of steps with impressive speed, self-checking the shape of their body and their placement in the mirror, an actor's work involves ownership, questioning, experimenting, choices and inhabiting every aspect of their character, including the movement. They need to understand and feel the intention behind an action. This approach to creating movement from the inside out and through collaborative searching and co-creating is better known in contemporary dance – but rare in other dance forms such as ballet, ballroom dancing or a big musical number.

Shining a light on this overlooked and undervalued field, there now comes a new book, *Movement Directors in Contemporary Theatre: Conversations on Craft*, by London-based movement director, teacher and researcher Ayse Tashkiran. The idea came to her back in 2009: she was at a round table with colleagues from her field, and realised it was the first time that movement directors were talking to other movement directors in a curated format about their common practice. There was no movement directors association in the UK at the time (Tashkiran and colleague Diane Alison-Mitchell founded one in August 2020). Movement directors are not recognised as theatre creatives by Equity, the UK's official union for performers and creatives; their work is often invisible, and until 2005, when the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama launched the first Movement Directing MA in Europe, there was no formal pathway into the career. And there is no book – until now.

Introducing the subject in traditional academic style, Tashkiran sketches the history of movement directing, from the early pioneers in the field such as Litz Pisk, Claude Chagrin, Geraldine Stephenson and Jean Newlove, to how they have influenced the following generation of practitioners.

The body of the book, however, is handed over to the original voices of movement directors working in theatre right now, and here is where the book really comes alive. Tashkiran has collected interviews with fellow movement directors for years. She is a great interviewer and a careful listener, instinctively taking a back seat and giving space and time to her interviewee, only intercepting to dig a little deeper or tease out more clarification. With only the lightest of editing, the different voices are largely left untouched, which can feel a little rough and ready at times, but makes up much of the book's charm. It brims with different personalities, unfinished thoughts and

> **Undefinably located somewhere between choreographer, associate director, therapist and dramaturg**

stream-of-consciousness monologues – the struggles of people who habitually work with bodies to find the right word.

The book allows us to sneak a peek directly into the rehearsal room and the very practical physical craft that happens there. While some of the movement directors have a background or formal training in dance, others come from acting (many citing the physical theatre school of Lecoq), others from the wider field of visual arts, literature or indeed the school of 'watching others, listening and learning'. The interviews all meander off in different directions but common themes arise. All of the movement directors struggle with describing precisely what they do, what to call themselves, and perhaps as a result of this uncertainty, with being recognised and credited for their contribution.



Ayse Tashkiran rehearsing Maria Aberg's 2018 production of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Royal Shakespeare Company. © Helen Maybanks/RSC

So what is a movement director? The role seems to be undefinably located somewhere between choreographer, associate director, therapist and dramaturg. Ann Yee, who has worked with illustrious theatre directors such as Phyllida Lloyd and Robert Icke, describes herself as simply 'a theatre maker', while others such as Steven Hoggett, founder of the physical theatre company Frantic Assembly, seem to fight with more convoluted, abstract ideas such as 'bringing to the fore that which exists in every piece of theatre: inherent in every actor and scene is physicality happening in front of a live audience.' Sue Lefton, whose movement work spans film, theatre and opera, admits 'I understand what movement directing means to me, but each director I work with will understand the term 'movement' in a totally different way'. And therein lies the crux.

Back to the nitty gritty of a movement director's work. There seem to be roughly three categories. The most obviously choreographic aspect is creating a specific dance sequence within a show, where the movement director, similar to a dramaturg, often brings knowledge of historic accuracy or social etiquette for period dances or formal social dance settings.

The second task all the movement directors stress as vitally important is to create a warm-up routine for the ensemble, to prepare them for physical activity and maintain levels of strength for the specific needs of the production that can be sustained for the run of the show. Other goals of a communal warm-up are to gel the ensemble together, for the movement director to see what levels of ability they are working with, to try some tasks to get creative juices flowing and create an atmosphere where ideas and discoveries can happen. Performers who strongly identify as actors or singers, with no formal dance training, can often be quite fearful

of dance, so preparing the room and making people comfortable is crucial.

The third and most substantial task for the movement director is then to find and develop the individual movement language of the specific production together with the performers. All the movement directors stress how they take their cues from the director, how the movement needs to seamlessly sit within the production and serve the director's vision. Movement directing is not for egomaniacs, but the humility needed in the rehearsal room can too often result in being overlooked in credits or awards (no UK theatre awards currently have no category for movement direction).

What of the future? The closing chapter gives space to a younger generation of up and coming movement directors, some of whom have been the first to take the newly available formal education path. Abandoning the previous format of one-on-one interviews, the indirect quotes, presumably taken from a group discussion, make this section feel more passive. Common aspirations from the younger movement makers are: to have more standing within a creative team and to be given more time and space to make a mark on a production. They talk about how movement directors can be instrumental in bringing about necessary changes in industry practice to safely perform intimacy or violence. They lament the instability and precariousness of freelance work, particularly work that is considered as peripheral or non-essential.

But as with dance, so with movement: it is forever being looked down upon. It's impossible to predict at this time, but the pandemic and the alarming jeopardy the theatre industry now finds itself in may mean the hopes and wishes for the future of movement directors could be more elusive than ever. •



> **As with dance, so with movement: it is forever being looked down upon**

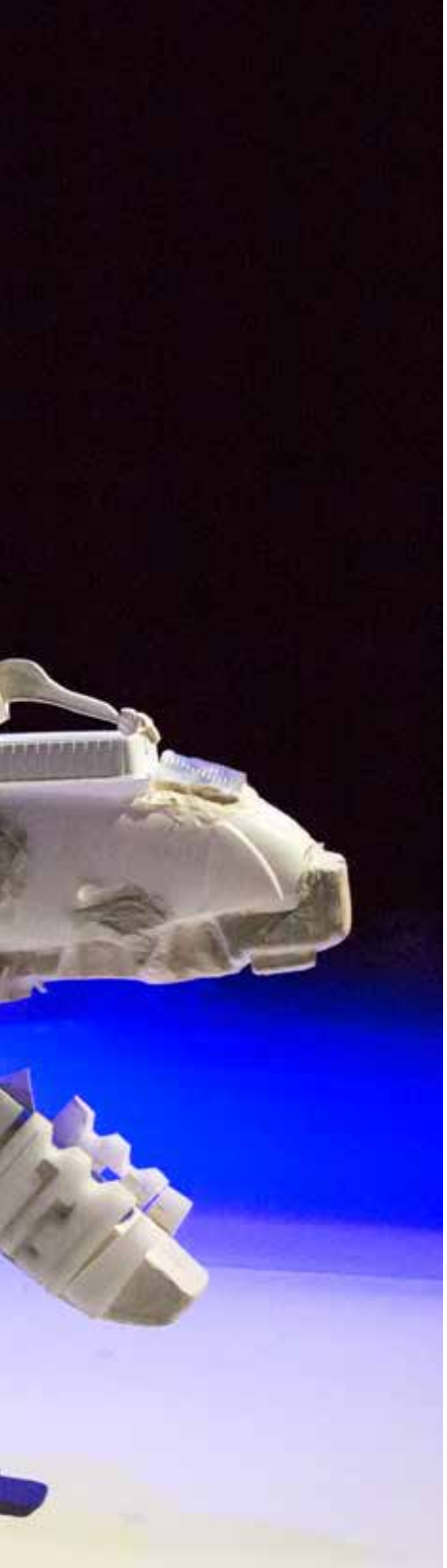
Do not feed the polar bears
Domokos Kovács & Petra Nagy

Lena Megyeri
15 October 2020

Two Hungarian creators on their response to environmental questions in conception, production and performance of their latest work



Domokos Kovács in
Do Not Feed the Polar Bears
Photo © Anett Kállai-Tóth



> **Our designer created a wonderful thing from a pile of rubbish. I fell in love with this animal right away**

In 2017, millions were shocked by National Geographic photographer Paul Nicklen's YouTube video, shot on Canada's Baffin Island, of the last minutes in the life of a starving polar bear, searching in vain for food in a habitat that the climate crisis had dramatically changed. Nicklen could not intervene even if he wanted, as feeding polar bears is illegal in Canada. This video was the starting point for *Do Not Feed the Polar Bears* by Hungarian puppeteer-actor Domokos Kovács, graduate of the University of Theatre and Film Arts Budapest, and his former classmate Petra Nagy. An allegorical reflection on our ecological and social crisis using puppetry, movement and dance, the performance confronts us with our neglect of our planet, in beautiful and heartbreaking ways.

Why did you choose movement as your primary means of expression for this topic?

DK: This is the theatrical language that I'm most interested in. I experiment with how puppetry and movement can interact and complement each other. I felt that this was also a very adequate choice of language for my chosen theme, as the issues that we talk about are truly elementary and visceral, just like dance itself. This two-minute video of the dying polar bear brought on so many associations to me, and I wanted to share my thoughts in a very stylised form.

PN: At first I was very nervous, because I'm rather shy, and dance is a challenge for me. On the other hand, I adore puppetry: it is the language I understand and love doing. When Domokos told me about his concept I was thinking of stories and narration, but he wanted more abstract things. I wondered if our different points of views would collide – but since we know each other so well and connect easily, it took me only two days to tune into his abstract way of thinking and his movement language.

Rehearsals took an unusually long period of nine months – why?

DK: I wanted a prolonged rehearsal period from the beginning, where we work on the material for a few weeks, then let it rest for a while, then take it up again. I happened to have nine months to devote to this project, and I liked the metaphorical meaning of this, and the fact that I can dedicate this time to the intensive work on the piece. In the end, Petra was only available to rehearse for two and a half months, but I started with the preparations months earlier. Each month we shared a video on YouTube about our progress, and every month we focused on a different aspect of the performance: music, dramaturgy or the puppet.

The central puppet, which depicts the head of a bear, is made entirely of plastic waste. Where did it come from?

I've started to feel a kind of shame any time I buy something unavoidable that is made of plastic

PN: Our visual designer, Zsófia Mihály-Geresdi, created a wonderful thing: a sculpture from a pile of rubbish. It consists of empty detergent bottles, residual Styrofoam and paper waste. One of the detergent bottles had a drop of liquid still left inside, which made the puppet smell incredible. I fell in love with this animal right away.

DK: Zsófia started working on the puppet during lockdown, and it is actually like her quarantine footprint: she only used rubbish that she and her family produced at home. You can also find boxes of takeaway Chinese food in it.

You also asked the public during the rehearsal period to collect plastic wrapping for you. How did they shape the performance?

DK: We used most of them for the set. The idea was that since we wanted to draw attention to the overuse of plastic, and it would have been quite hypocritical to buy or produce a lot of new plastic wrap for our bearskins. So we thought these should be made of recycled plastic as well, and we tried to spend on as few new things for the show as possible. Also, we invented a technique involving an iron to repair damaged plastic.

PN: One of the bearskins was donated by me: we bought a mattress, and I kept its wrapping for about a year, so that we can use it for the show! I was really proud of that.

You talked about wanting to create an interactive performance. How did this come about in the end?

DK: I wanted the kind of interaction where the audience is in a passive position, and that is what makes them uncomfortable. I wanted them to realise that we are all just passive observers of the catastrophes around us. In the end, we decided that the strongest way of that is to reinforce the feeling of sitting in an auditorium and being a passive observer of what is happening on stage. With a metaphorical wink we say: we know you are out there.

To what extent can sustainability play a role in your other works?

PN: At Vaskakas Puppet Theatre, of which I'm a company member, we all strive to reuse and renovate set elements that have been in our warehouse for years. We don't throw away anything; we use everything several times.

DK: As a freelancer, I work mostly in independent productions. In Hungary, in these productions we are forced to recycle things, as the budget is so small that there's not enough money for new things. We don't buy our costumes in fashion stores or get them tailored; we go to second-hand shops instead. With *Do Not Feed the Polar Bears*, our production partner, Manna Production joined a programme called 'green theatre'. Their aim is to not buy new things any more, but use only existing sets and props, or exchange things with other theatres in the programme.

Did you have any new revelations or experiences regarding climate crisis during the making of this work?

PN: There are scenes in the performance where we are entirely wrapped in plastic,



Petra Nagy. Photo © Anett Kállai-Tóth

and our whole bodies are connected with it. I started to be disgusted by this material: I don't like touching it, while on the other hand I'm locked in it, I dance in it, and of course it means a lot of things in the context of the performance, other than being just plastic. We got a lot of feedback from our audience that they started to feel anxious watching us drown into the wrapping over and over again for 50 minutes. We don't want to alienate people from plastic, we just want them to realise certain things. Like that polar bears – and a lot of other species – are going to die out. Lately, I've started to feel a kind of shame any time I buy something unavoidable that is made of plastic. It turns into anxiety, which is not a good thing, because after all, anxiety is an illness that needs to be cured. I think it will be very interesting to see what happens in the next decades, when whole generations will grow up with climate anxiety.

DK: I think it's important to find harmony and balance and avoid extremes. I can relate to the human side of the performance the most. Maybe it's because I'm a puppeteer – or maybe that is the reason why I became a puppeteer – but I anthropomorphise everything, even the Earth. I've recently heard about the term ecofeminism, that compares the centuries-long exploitation of women to the exploitation of the Earth. According to this theory, the Earth needs a kind of emancipatory process that women have had, and just as feminism is still an ongoing fight, the Earth needs to go down the same path. While working on this show, I thought a lot about my connection to different social groups, and about the things people can do for each other. This is how this project made my connection to the world more empathetic.

Tell us about your next plans, please!

PN: During the period of lockdown I started a kind of family theatre with my fiancé; we felt a certain helplessness during those months that brought the idea to life. In these productions I can try out things that I cannot as a member of a company. Next week will be the premiere of my first performance for babies as a director, and I'm rehearsing in two more productions as an actor. I'm in a good flow, and this project with Domokos helped me get into it. It was a refreshing experience and an exciting job. We would also like to work together again in the future, because we are also like a little family.

DK: It's more a matter of opportunity. This piece took two and a half years to complete from the moment we first applied for funds. I feel very lucky to be having a lot of work and with many different people, but it seems to me that it's very hard to find grants and opportunities as a young artist to create your own work. Currently I'm working on a Peter Pan production as a choreographer; later in the season I'm creating a half-puppetry, half-performance show for teenagers with another former classmate of mine. Last year I took part in one of Eszter Salamon's dance pieces, and we were meant to go on an international tour which was cancelled because of the pandemic, so it's now scheduled for next spring. And in the meantime, I just keep being preoccupied with all these recent big fires around us: from the Amazon to the bushfires in Australia, wildfires in California, in the Arctic... •

kinkaleri: is it my world?

Anastasio Koukoutas
19 October 2020

How a public relay by Italian group kinkaleri turns into a fruitful question: have we become estranged from the world we created?

The world is a collapsing shit factory, wrote Darren O'Donnell in *Social Acupuncture: A Guide to Suicide, Performance and Utopia* in 2006 – a blatantly political and not overly pessimistic statement about the future of our consumerist societies and the persistently utopian role of art within them. What's maybe most disturbing about this statement is that it remains accurate and acutely relevant in the present moment.

While reading the news, catching up with the world's latest attempt to convince us of a futureless, 'there is no alternative' fate, I stumbled upon some pictures of the Italian performing group kinkaleri. A slogan, 'is it my world?', printed on stickers and placed in various incongruous places, such as a porcelain urinal or a post office box, reminded me of a Dadaist communication tool to invite people to a performance. This crucial and alarming question, 'is it my world?', also seemed to capture art's internecine struggle after the Covid-19 pandemic. Have we become estranged from the world we created?

This unconventional performance is only a part of what kinkaleri call their world. The slogan was initially designed for an initiative – now in its tenth year – that combines residencies, ongoing choreographic research and exchange of ideas with younger artists in their base, spaziok, in Prato (Italy). But foremost the project was about the idea of a shared space that could accommodate critical questioning about the practices and the relations of the people working within the dance field. No wonder that in a moment of artistic stasis, when all the above were suspended, the slogan came to the surface, carrying both an existential and a political meaning.

In fact, the very question became the locus of the performance, which has taken place already in Florence (May 2020) and Rome (July 2020). The participants – potentially anyone in good enough shape to cover the distance – were called to be part of a relay, running while carrying a white flag with the slogan 'is it my world?' written on it. The itinerary wasn't conceived just by taking in mind the kilometric distance; neither sports nor competition is at the heart of kinkaleri's concept. Instead, what the flag represents in relation to the symbolic value of public space that was in question: the very opening and reclaiming of this space, which after the quarantine became even more vital and evident. Especially in cities like Rome and Florence, once flooded by herds of tourists every day, this remarkable 'vacancy' made kinkaleri re-examine the shrinking of public space in comparison to the rising will of citizens to be outdoors again and present.

Interestingly enough, this performance doesn't have utopian ambitions. It's simple and fragmentary, furtively political and coyly



Is it my world? Rome 2020
Photo © kinkaleri

humorous, if we think of how kinkaleri are subverting the historical significance of the relay and how their performance, without being a parody, re-examines the ambiguous circumstances of its reappearance. It's a simple act to execute – no extra skills needed, you just take the flag and run – and exemplary of how the will to participate in this relay performs something else than the usual experience of 'being together'.

Without falling into the ideological trap of either extreme individualism, that would favour antagonism between the participants, or extreme collectivism, that would subsume everyone in a higher abstract goal, this relay shows us the middle way: questioning if there is a goal after all, an accomplishment other than just a vague sense of being part of a bigger picture of which the pieces you do not hold. Run, meet the next one, pass the flag on. End? Maybe. But most importantly, resign from the fantasy that you can make a difference, that you are carrying a bigger message to the world. You don't know whose world this is anyway.

What is it all about then? It's not the spirit of agonism: it's not about young muscular messengers carrying a universal meaning; it's not even about the grandiose backdrop of Florence or Rome, which – however empty – still keep their fascination intact. What does a running body perform in public anyway? Let's rephrase: what does

Advertising campaign, political demonstration, delirious act or purely artistic project?

a running body ask via its presence in public? There's a message on the flag, sure, but also the body in public can be 'the message' placed in a wider context – that is, the city in its given circumstances.

Actually, kinkaleri are intrigued by the very ambiguity of this gesture: is it an advertising campaign, a political demonstration, a delirious act or a purely artistic project? The very significance of this ambiguity lies in 'what bodies can do with words' – the performativity of language mixed with the performativity of the body in public. Just as the runner/performer crosses the city carrying the flag, so the body crosses language, participating in a relay of meanings. In a moment that 'our world' has lost its consistency, we are invited to ask again: 'is it our world?' and more specifically, could a performance help us trace a possible answer?

We all know that the emancipatory role of art has few if any possibilities left. As with every institution which has withdrawn from its reformative power



into a more entrepreneurial endeavour, one might wonder, what difference does it make to publicly problematise if not provoke passers-by with asking: 'is it my world?' Isn't it just irony in reverse – art being exposed to its limits and failing to respond critically to its incessant commodification?

kinkaleri don't want to be didactic, pointing dogmatically in this or that direction. They think of the moment in terms of possibilities, and work on actualising what the moment has to offer. If the runners/performers have limited power, in terms of what can be achieved in this performance, their presence could still remind us that the power of art lies in its non-power; in a revolutionary irony the simplicity of this performance allowed for the unexpected and the awkward to appear publicly without the ambition of a lasting effect. In our devastating reality, even if things are not so accessible and possibilities may not always yield something fruitful, kinkaleri playfully urge us to run, just as they say, to find a way to return to this earth.

What the runners/performers can achieve in this project may be limited, but their presence still reminds us that the power of art lies in its non-power. In a revolutionary irony, the simplicity of this performance allowed for the unexpected and the awkward to appear in public, without the ambition of a lasting effect. In our devastating current reality, where access to change is restricted and possibilities may not yield fruit, kinkaleri playfully urge us to run, as they say, to find a way to return to this world. •

The leap into the abyss and the need to heal again

Anastasio Koukoutas
29 October 2020

Recent dance graduates speak about how they feel about their future, in the face of the coronavirus crisis

As a teacher of dance history, I'd like to think that to most dance students the school is still considered a safe place. Up until now, 'safe' meant not only providing the space for experimentation, but also creating the room for possibilities that will enable transformation according to the will of each student. History, after all, is the space of the emergence of possibilities embodied in subjectivities, both individual and collective. With the arrival of Covid-19 in our lives, 'safety' has been transformed into something clinical – as we are all exposed to the threat of being infected – compromising not just the idea of 'together' but also altering the very notion of possibility within the dance field. Nothing will be the same again, cried many professionals, now facing the highest rates of unemployment in decades.

This is not only a fear: it's a fact that has an enormous effect on dance educators when I think of the graduates and their narrowing prospects, due to the pandemic. What is out there for them? The great unknown, undeniably, but without the excitement that they could finally go chasing their dreams. Fear, most definitely, but one that pulls them down instead of making them trust their instincts – as they will be told to do, innumerable times. A continuous paradox of imperatives demanding students to be always adaptable and versatile, even in the most difficult times: be malleable, strong, sensitive, gracious, fearless, dazzling, daring, winning, a fully grown individual. A litany of stereotypes, if not binaries, that leave no space for an in-between alternative. And now? No prospects. No future. In what ways might their experience differ from an older generation already doomed by austerity measures, neoliberalism and political conservatism?

I had the chance to interview five of my recent students, to talk about their fears and dreams – as it is only anticipated from people of their age. Eugenia, Aristea, Fenia, Ioanna – and Stali, who has only sent me some written comments – are five promising dancers, in their early twenties, whose graduation coincided with the unprecedented global crisis. For years now, many generations have been confronted with dystopian scenarios about the future, but theirs might be more like waking up in a nightmare. Is there any room left for hope? Their disarming honesty leaves no room for excuses. Where my generation failed – the moment of our breakthrough coincided with a major economic crisis back in 2008, leaving us with rancour where there were once high hopes – their fear isn't primarily about professional doom and the shortage of possibilities. When Fenia says 'I fear that I might not be able to dance again,' she wonders if she would be able again to achieve a moment of belonging, to reach for and support the other, to be creative and try the limits of collective creativeness. When I hear them talking, I think of their will



Siora Photography / Unsplash

to actualise the many possibilities dance has to offer, I understand their priority to share first, to achieve second. So, with dance among the activities that needs to be restrained because of Covid-19, their crisis seems both existential and real.

In the months that followed the quarantine and the Zoom hype, which many schools adopted to stay in touch with students, we were invited back to the physical space of the school. Returning, though, did not mean going back to the usual. Students felt the need to protect themselves and others by respecting distancing measures, but also to touch and learn to trust again. The imperative to stay safe demanded a reworking of the concept of togetherness and co-immunity. Covid-19 was not perceived just as a public threat; it was above all a forced reminder that even our bodies are not always a safe place. Aristea mentioned, for example, 'I tried to figure out if it made any sense staying fit/healthy, taking care of myself and eventually what being a graduate really feels like.'

Dancers are highly trained to notice and honour subtle nuances that permeate both their minds and bodies. The pressure to perform well in the exams in mid-July, only two months after the shock of the quarantine, combined with a certain 'amnesia' – both of the embodied subtleties and the discomfort – since success is perceived in one way: through hard work and discipline. Those two aspects collided with the feelings of the students. Fenia speaks of a 'leap into an abyss' once you graduate, 'a realisation that all of a sudden you are alone, unprotected'. Eugenia also feels unprepared in relation to knowing how to live up to the status of professional dance life. 'How to preserve a value you don't even know you own?' If the school is a promise and learning is the process of becoming, are we showing them the way to a world that has already collapsed.

> **I understand their priority to share first, to achieve second**

Let's be realistic: in Greece, there has been a steady but unmet demand for higher dance education, so studying dance could easily seem like career suicide. But how could dancers be productive if we think they are useless to society? What if we thought of dance in terms of possibility and not mere productivity? 'What is possible for a twenty-year-old graduate with no work experience, especially in a moment when there is no demand for such expertise?' they ask. Teaching? Maybe, hopefully. Freelancing? Unfortunately so. Ioanna talks humorously of their struggle to familiarise themselves with marketing tools, to make their curricula more appealing, observing how the market solicits an entrepreneurial approach to their craft and artistic identity. However, as Fenia argues, we shouldn't demonise the market, we need to think of it in terms of sustainability and horizontal procedures and not just as an endless parade of entertainments offered to an apathetic and politically alienated public. Otherwise, she suggests, we could easily be trapped in our own bubbles, losing what we can achieve collectively and failing to become conscious of our identities, socially and economically, as dancers.

Athens was for my generation the place to be; gentrification was still mild, housing was affordable, we didn't think of dance in terms of cultural hegemony and we believed that institutions would foster our community. Now, for many artists, Athens is no longer an option – unless you are generously funded by institutions and 'living your myth in Greece'. When faced with the dilemma – 'should I stay or should I go?' – younger people don't feel nostalgic about the past. They don't feel defeated either, knowing that if leaving Athens is a valid scenario, then it should be sustained as such and not as an emergency exit. Stali, maybe a bit more romantic, talks of a sustainable love, one that empowers the relations of dancers with the rest of the community. But will this generation be able to demystify the metropolis as the place of endless opportunities and turn to something more rewarding, that prioritises human relations instead of personal fame?

As they prepare for auditions and their placement in the market – however timid, there are some opportunities rising again – these recent graduates insist that it is important to keep those profound realisations that were made with the arrival of Covid-19. It is, after all, the generation who saw a person of their age, Alexis Grigoropoulos, being murdered by a police officer back in 2008, when they were still in school but willingly flooded the streets of Athens to demand justice and a fairer future. Years later, with politics taking a conservative turn and art being sacrificed as an unnecessary luxury, they acknowledge that maybe the power to affect anything with dance is limited. 'It will take time to heal,' Aristea mentions, but in the meantime there's a lot to protest about, still, if we think that the present moment is of any significance. As we end our conversation to go and join a demonstration, Aristea's words keep echoing in my head: maybe healing is what we ought to bring back into discussion, contrary to the inescapable financial violence which has jeopardised the social consciousness and the sensibility of our art. •



Clockwise from bottom: Ioanna, Eugenia, Fenia, Aristea, Stali

Sonoma Surrealism and me



I binge Buñuel and see what he does to me, and I imagine what he would be doing now



La Veronal in Marcos Morau's *Sonoma*
© Anna Fàbrega

The artistic, cultural and personal histories in Marcos Morau's Sonoma

Clàudia Brufau
10 November 2020

As if the earth swallows you inside its guts, the roar of the drums expand solemnly across a huge hall. At once, nine dancers attired in bulky skirts and a *Handmaid's Tale*-style bonnet slide apace across the white marble floor. Archaic and visceral, the first minutes of Marcos Morau's *Sonoma* drag you into the telluric universe of the Calanda drums, a tradition from the hometown of Spanish filmmaker Luís Buñuel. Premiered at Barcelona's Grec Festival in July 2020 at the Sala Oval of the National Museum of Art of Catalonia (MNAC), *Sonoma* reprises some ideas from Morau's earlier piece *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, created in 2016 on Ballet de Lorraine and inspired by Buñuel's art and life.

Unlike most choreographers, Marcos Morau (Valencia, 1982) is not a trained dancer; instead he jumped into the world of dance because he wanted to choreograph. In partnership with a group of artist friends, he set up his company La Veronal in 2005 (named after the drug Virginia Woolf took on her first suicide attempt) to create dance works using expressive tools from other artistic fields such as cinema, literature, photography and visual arts. His talent started to be noticed with *Russia* (2011) and *Siena* (2013), and at the age of just thirty-two he received the National Dance Award from the Spanish Ministry of Culture. Besides La Veronal, he has been invited to work with prestigious dance companies across the world such as the National Dance Company of Spain, Scapino Ballet Rotterdam, Skånes Dansteater, the Royal Danish Ballet and Ballet de Lorraine.

Since I first met Morau – we were both studying for a master's degree at Institut del Teatre in 2008 – what has fascinated me most about him and his company was their imagery, exuberant and full of flavoursome cultural references. Sonoma is no exception. The stunning images still echo in my head when I meet Morau in a café in Barcelona some days after the premiere and just before he takes a train to Madrid to teach a workshop at the Ballet de España. During an hour we chat about how the lockdown affected him, the production, his approach to Buñuel and surrealism, and what could Sonoma be about.

The lockdown that started in mid-March caught Morau in the midst of a hectic and productive season: in January he had been working at Teatro Real de Madrid for an opera, and in February he had premiered *Carnival of the Animals* with Skånes Dansteater in Sweden.

'At the beginning, the idea of staying at home felt like a sort of relief, but after two weeks I realised that I missed the stress and sharing snacks with Lorena [Nogal, one of the dancers and choreographic assistants] at the airports, the meetings with the technical team, rehearsals with dancers. These feelings made me feel a victim of

hyperproduction.' [In 2019 Morau completed five productions and in 2020, three.] 'After the confinement I jumped into the rehearsals like a cat in heat!' he blurts out – then chuckles, teasing me not to include this in the interview. La Veronal produced the piece in one stint of less than three months. Balancing the pros and cons of the situation, Morau says: 'On the bright side, the dancers and the rest of the team worked with an extraordinary intensity and eagerness, however I really missed the slow burn.'

Throughout the confinement, Morau was in constant touch with the backbone of La Veronal: dramaturgs Carmina Sanchis, Celso Giménez (La Tristura) and Pablo Gisbert (El Conde de Torrefiel), who also happen to be childhood friends and collaborators with the company since its inception. For *Sonoma*, they adapted a long list of beatitudes (blessings) written for *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*, and shaped a new dramaturgy. With *Sonoma*, Morau travels back to his own roots and childhood memories while exploring Buñuel's universe.

Sonoma is infused by the world Luís of Buñuel, one of the leading figures in Surrealism. As a Spanish artist, Morau believes the filmmaker to be a definitive reference, not only for the way he composed, narrated and edited films, but for his ethics and thinking. 'I have a lot in common with him: a deeply Catholic upbringing,' states Morau, who grew up in Ontinyent, a village near Valencia, and went to a colegio de curas, a Catholic school run by priests (Buñuel received a Jesuit education in a boarding school in Zaragoza). Morau may have outgrown this past, yet at the same time he wants 'to use where I come from to understand the world in which we live' – in a similar way that Buñuel portrayed traditions, religious mania and delved into atavism through own his sharp wit.

It is not the first time that Morau has embraced the world of an iconic artist: first with *Los Pájaros muertos* on Pablo Picasso in 2009 (adapted for Scapino Ballet under the title *Pablo*), and later with *Rothko Chapel* for GöteborgOperans Danskompani (2017). 'I never intend to explain who the artist was or what he did. I binge Buñuel and see what he does to me, and I imagine what he would be doing now.' But when Buñuel was young and lived in the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid with Salvador Dalí and Federico García Lorca, he could daydream of conquering the world. 'A century later,' as Morau points out, 'the world and the arts have been devoured. After all the events of the twentieth century and artists like Marina Abramović or the postmodern movement, what are we talking about in 2020? How do we face the stage? A naked body on stage looks like an anecdote. Returning to the origins is the least we can do.'

So for Morau, Buñuel has never been so current, especially after a long confinement in which we have had to stop the hasty pace of life that disconnects us from the earth. La Veronal and Morau build a concept to bond with the earth, the body and the flesh through movement and sound. *Soma* is an Ancient Greek word meaning body, and *sonum* in Latin means sound; thus, *Sonoma* could mean either 'sound body' or 'body of sound'. Besides, *Sonoma* is an actual

> I jumped into the rehearsals like a cat in heat





Photo © Anna Fàbrega

place in California, which in the indigenous language of the people of the area translates into the 'valley of the moon'.

Morau tends to ask me what I think about particular moments of the choreography or mise-en-scène, as if trying to spot things to improve while at the same time digging into possible meanings in the piece that might have escaped him. 'Do you think *Sonoma* is about gender?' he inquires. And while I try to mumble a decent answer, he continues: 'Have you noticed in how many paintings, or works of art like ballet, women form a mass surrounding a man? There's this imaginary in art that women are that background noise, but they are never the word. In our tradition, while voice is a feminine thing, speech is a masculine one. I didn't want the dancers to embody a noise, but words and speech. I wanted them to speak. So now I realise that there's more gender in this approach than I originally conceived.'

In **Sonoma**, the dancers declaim a long list of beatitudes in French to pay homage to 'all the women who have never been included in the history books, but who taught how to speak to their children,' Morau discloses. 'I wanted to create a community of women, who treated each other well but at the same time destroyed or bullied one of them. As individuals belonging to communities, we do not always fit. We fear rejection and therefore sometimes we feel compelled to abandon certain things to be accepted.'

Conveying this theme of community, the nine dancers – Lorena Nogal, Marina Rodríguez, Sau-Ching Wong, Ariadna Montfort, Núria Navarra, Àngela Boix, Laia Duran, Anna Hierro and Alba Barral – enter the stage looking indistinguishable from one another. Designer Silvia Delagneau's work is mesmerising: the bulky skirts, the rural patterns and the white bonnets propel the onlooker to a vague rural past with touches of Lower Aragon accent. A female rural and earthy past. The movement and the scenes are deeply embedded in the sound and rhythms inspired by traditional Aragonese by Juan Cristóbal Saavedra. The dancers incarnate an army of village women enrolling in a choreography that relies mainly on ensemble work rather than the intricate duos and trios with which the company has forged its distinctive 'Kova' style. From the stark solemnity of the first scene, the choreography progresses into lightless revealing the nine women as bodies of sound, bodies full of words and inner conflicts, but mainly as subjects channelling a deep and long awaited cry.

Dance, as in all of La Veronal's productions, becomes an amalgam of dazzling images such as the glowing moon floating over the dancers or – in one of the most tender and mesmerising moments – two figures in outsize old-woman headmasks. These figures, together with the backstage elements such as travel trunks and spotlights, provide a cinematographic approach; or as Morau casually puts it: 'as if Vogue had landed in the middle of an Aragon village for a photoshoot about jotas and they had stumbled upon these grannies.' Later, he utters with gravitas: 'These kinds of contrasting images that connect with the primitive, divine and carnal are what Buñuel is about. •

Visible and erased
The case of the 'Alzheimer's ballerina'

Anastasio Koukoutas
27 November 2020

What does the viral video of a former dancer with Alzheimer's disease suggest about the dancer, about disease, about us?

Like! Share! Done!

As the internet is being fully integrated into our lives, a technological tool which not only amplifies but also reconfigures many attributes of the public sphere, we have become accustomed to the viral effect and mass circulation of images and videos, along with the ethical complications our (sometimes automated) acts of sharing and republishing entail. A recent example, a video showing Marta González, a ballet dancer in the 1960s who suffered from Alzheimer's and died in March 2020, flooded social media platforms and enthused thousands of users with her overwhelming 'performance' as her embodied memory of steps from *Swan Lake* awakens when she listens to Tchaikovsky's score.

Despite the empowering message of the video – which underlined the beneficial use of arts in cases of Alzheimer's and other dementias, offering insight into the patient's experience and also causing our empathic engagement – it was exactly this mediated account of the patient's story that caused some critique. According to standard guidelines by medical associations, when a patient lacks the mental capacity to consent to the possible uses of such material, whoever has the power to act on behalf of that individual has to exercise this power in the best interest of the patient. Although we do not have access to the background of the story, knowing if such guidelines were respected, nor to a consistent narrative of her life as many details proved falsified, there's an unresolved ethical conflict at the heart of this case: is the medical gaze the only possible way to relate to that individual? Could her story be told without disregarding the ethical complications of allowing it to unrestrictedly circulate online?

This dilemma is not an excuse for either violating the patient's privacy or breaching existing medical protocols designed to prevent the release of confidential, sensitive data. Although we may not agree with disclosing any of Marta González's personal data – even if many cannot be verified (her age, for example), making her mysterious life sound like fiction – we can agree that her story emerged as a hinge between the layered experiences of Alzheimer's disease and the dancing body, producing spontaneous responses and encouraging many other similar stories to be told. In some cases, it may have helped to debunk the use of Alzheimer's as a metaphor for the pathology of a body unable to access its own lived history. But, most importantly, one might argue that this video refused to circumscribe Alzheimer's as strictly medical territory by focusing further on the relation between visuality and embodiment – a nexus often neglected by medico-industrial practices.



In her story, loss and life meet, or to paraphrase Peggy Phelan, her perspective characterises (her) performance as a 'rehearsal of loss', honouring the very fragility of life, the caesura between letting go and regaining control. This contrast is visible in several cases during the clip: in the beginning, González moves her hand to request an increase of volume but then withdraws, seemingly unprepared for the transformative impact the music has on her. With the escalating force of the music, she opens her waving arms, like a fledgling ready to rise to the sky. Her expressions are dramatic, conveying her response to the score, her memories, her life in dance. Just as we recognise some signature gestures from the ballet, we also see her arms become a substitute for her legs, mirroring movements that otherwise would be performed on pointe shoes. Her dance is beyond a mimetic act based on the choreography; hers is a dance of embodiment accessed through the 'lack' of memory – a 'syntax of loss' that formulates her encounters with her past. Loss, here, becomes the uncovering of a 'wound', through which we witness the intensity of (her) living (with Alzheimer's).

There's a counter-narrative to all this that we should, clearly, investigate as well. The video is edited, probably by the association Música para Despertar (in a free translation 'Music to awaken you') who initially published it online. The extra, uncredited excerpts are from Ulyana Lopatkina in Fokine's solo dance Dying Swan, which was set to music by Saint-Saëns. Though there is no direct correlation between the two dancers, the implication of these edits – that González might or should have looked like Lopatkina in the past, and that her movements suggest the elegance of a former prima ballerina – romanticises González's story, excluding any kind of real-life suffering. If the video encourages a sense of 'active sympathy', defying what could otherwise be a vulgar act of voyeurism, the interpolated images of Lopatkina also displace González's own history, denying her the right to own her experience, however fragmented that might have been.

This last detail, along with the doubts over the violation of medical protocols, attests to a common online 'practice', in which the other, or any representation of the other, is often deployed to suggest that arts and culture serve as a soft supplement for a more complex real-life situation. Phrases such as 'once a dancer, always a dancer' fail to capture the complexity of her situation, offering instead normative, stereotypical views of her life. But perhaps it is just those neglected nuances of her life and her experience of the disease that can help promote patient-centred approaches within healthcare through more critical, social and even mediated engagement. Despite all this, the video remains a good example to suggest a more affective way of knowing bodies, beyond the objectifying, sometimes cold medical gaze, and to surpass conflicting positions by bringing closer the binaries of knowing and feeling, understanding and empathising. •



Life sentences

On reviewing and renewing

Sanjoy Roy
08 December 2020

Dance writing – getting out of subjectivity and into the subject

Photo: Jurien Huggins / Unsplash

To write a review, to keep writing reviews, is to learn one lesson, over and over again: you failed. No matter how inept I think the performance I've just seen, my writing – however good I try to make it – will fail to do it justice. I will overlook, distort, misremember, invent. The review, then, becomes a kangaroo court in which I serve as both unreliable witness and biased judge. Corruption compounds failure. And the cycle repeats.

Should I 'fail better'? This exhortation to pick yourself up, learn from your mistakes, and get back into the game has become popular in self-help, sporting and entrepreneurial circles, and you can see why: it suggests, in its peppy, TED-talkish way, that with enough resilience and application, you can turn failure into success. But for Samuel Beckett – who coined the phrase in the first place – failure was an existential condition. To fail better is not, then, some lesser version of to succeed. It is living with failure. Or even: living as failure.

I'm with Beckett on this. Reviews are failures, by definition. Objectivity, fair representation, impartiality, completeness – these are unattainable fantasies, and it is better to accept that than to strive to achieve them. In other words: get real.

One way of getting real is to declare our subjectivity. On the witness stand, we no longer vow to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, one hand on a holy book. Rather, we place a hand upon our own heart, and declare our partiality. If I cannot be fair, we say, I can be honest.

I sympathise with this stance, but as with objectivity, it has its pitfalls and its



failures: it can be a lazy excuse; none of us is honest; and who is this 'I' anyway? It can also become self-authorising (*I feel, therefore it is*) or self-centred (*this is about me*) – and hence all too easily neglect the performance, or the reader, or both.

This journey from failed objectivity to avowed self-reflection reminds me of *Village Voice* dance critic Jill Johnston in 1960s New York. In accordance with her developing views on art and criticism, Johnston's writing grew more explicitly subjective (or 'megalocentric', as she called it, in hindsight), so her practical-minded editor duly changed the title of her column from 'Dance' to 'Dance Journal' and finally to 'Jill Johnston' – and hired another critic (Deborah Jowitt, who was to become a major figure in the school of 'descriptive criticism') to review dance.

In the end, I find this perennial objectivity–subjectivity debate – the whole kangaroo court caboodle – more interesting in theory than in practice. It may be good for college essays, but it is no guarantor of good writing, and the lesson I learn is always the same: fail, fail, fail. Can we get out of this courtroom, or classroom, and do something else?

Right now, as it happens, I do find myself in a different classroom. A Zoom-room. The Covid-19 crisis, having put a spoke in the wheel of dance performance, has flipped me out of the reviewing cycle and I am instead teaching dance writing online for Siobhan Davies Dance, an artist-run space in London that is currently locked down. I've done writing workshops before, most often with Springback Academy and Magazine, but this is the first time

Can we give life to text, set our sentences in motion?

they've been entirely uncoupled from live performance, and so from the overlapping agendas of artists, promoters, publicists, publications and readers. We meet online, see no live shows, and since we watch only dance clips and I consider dance on screen to be film rather than performance, we write no dance reviews. I have found this a blessed relief: I'm out of the kangaroo court and into a more open-skyed place where we can look at the connections between writing and dancing. Here are some of the things that – with much help from my students – I have been discovering so far.

> **Scholarly writing is edifying, but post-mortem: the subject is dead**

First: with no outcome to aim for – the written review – it's possible to change the classroom into a playroom. A place of exploration, not achievement. Dance artists talk about 'movement generation' before they shape their material into phrases, arcs and scenes. This is our equivalent: word generation.

Nevertheless, it is surprisingly hard to have fun with writing. Much easier to be serious. A legacy from our school and college days, I guess. Speech, interestingly, doesn't have the same chokehold. So I encourage us to verbalise; that is, to talk with each other. This personalises our interactions. With practice, it personalises our dance writing too, so that we sound less like disembodied texts, more like people communicating.

In the goal-oriented review, writers – and readers – often focus on three questions: what did it mean, what's the backstory, was it any good? Interpretation, contextualisation, evaluation. Without that goal, I've been finding it more rewarding to explore two other areas: what happened (description) and how to write interestingly (engagement). 'Description' (or 'observation', as I prefer to call it) is often pooh-poohed as unscholarly – that is, naive – but it is the very intersection of our medium (text) and our topic (art), and nothing else works without it. Combine the two questions – what happened and how to write interestingly – and there is nothing naive about it at all.

Finally, there are some matters of life and death. I mean, in our sentences. Scholarly writing – the application and illustration of theories, the showing of inner workings – can make dance feel like a butterfly pinned to a board, or a corpse dissected for display in an anatomy theatre. It is edifying, but post-mortem: the subject is dead. Can we give life to text, set our sentences in motion? I look for answers in neither dance theory nor critical theory, but in creative writing, with its musings on storytelling, imagery, voice, scene and style.

When I get out of this Zoom-room, post-Covid, will my writing change? Will my students'? I cannot say. For the moment, I am thankful to be learning some different lessons. I am discovering how much I prefer writing sentences to giving verdicts. How freeing it is to release sentences from the solemn duties of courtroom and classroom, and allowing words and thoughts to play together. Rather than inert marks pressed upon page or screen, writing comes to feel like a living network connecting subject, writer and reader. Ultimately, when dance returns to live performance, I will try to remember this: to live is more valuable than to know. •

Screening times

Emily May
21 January 2021

Four videodance curators reflect on the renewed proximity between screened dance and screendance

The seemingly relentless march of digital media into our everyday lives has only been accelerated by the global coronavirus pandemic. More than ever before, we shop online, work online, communicate online. Dance has, of necessity, shifted online too.

Screened dance or screendance?

In some ways, this is nothing new: dance and film have been partners since the beginning of cinema, and 'screendance' has developed into its own distinct art form. 'Screendance, in a very wide definition, consists of choreography that's been created specifically for the screen, and directly in collaboration with audio visual materials,' says Marisa Hayes, a screendance specialist and the co-curator of the International Video Dance Festival of Burgundy, France. 'In the 40s, Maya Deren, a seminal figure in the development of the genre, said that a filmdance' – specific terms have changed over time – 'is a dance that cannot exist anywhere else outside the film.'



Photo © Franck Boulègue

In short, Hayes is pointing towards the difference between screened dance and screendance. For many, the former – making recordings of live performance available on the internet – is problematic. Much stage work does not translate well into the digital space, yet as an economical way of showing dance for presenters and audiences alike, there is the worry that screened dance will replace live performance. This has been exacerbated by strides forward in livestreaming and scheduled viewings that somewhat recreate the collective sense of theatre. Streaming's potential to reach wider, global audiences without touring-induced carbon emissions also can't go unnoted.

A chance to experiment

Regardless of their take on screened dance, many artists have been turning to the screendance during the pandemic: an artform that allows them to create work that will be seen in the medium it was made for. This experimentation has been encouraged by dance organisations, who are offering funding, commissions, and online screendance workshops. 'In November we had so many requests to join our workshops that we couldn't fit everyone in: 40 people applied and there were only 15 slots. We ran an extra one in December to accommodate the interest,' says Adriana Almeida Pees, director of dance at Theater Freiburg in Germany, which is also home to its own International Screendance Festival.

This new-found interest is largely welcomed by the screendance community. 'Screendance is perhaps used to a sort of modus operandi of being a niche, or the poor cousin of other artforms. Now, there's potential to expand and diversify, and to reach across to popular culture,' says UK-based Claudia Kappenberg, founder editor of the International Journal of Screendance citing the BBC/Netflix crime drama *Giri/Haji*'s concluding dance scene as an example of screendance infiltrating mainstream media.

Some, however, are wary of screendance being viewed as second best to live performance. 'There are many artists who have been working in screendance for years, who have been trying to encourage appreciation of the medium as something different from live dance, not in competition with it,' says Hayes. Furthermore, Kappenberg argues that 'in the history of the arts there has always been this idea that photography would be the death of painting, or that cinema would be the death of theatre. This has never come to pass. So screendance won't be the death of live dance, ever. It would be great if they collaborated more.'

Collaboration

Collaborations between screendance and live dance do already exist. Adrienne Brown, for example, directs Wicklow Screendance Laboratory, a festival located just outside of Dublin, Ireland. 'It straddles film and live dance. It's very important for me to still have dancers in the space,' she explains. 'There's no difficulty in bringing the two together, it's all about the art of dance for me.'

Screendance can also help choreographers reshape their approach to documentation.

Some are wary of screendance being viewed as second best to live performance


© Sabina Andrea Allen

‘In the theatre we experience the surge of energy that happens on stage. That can really get lost in the recording process,’ says Hayes. ‘With screendance, we’re saying that instead of being loyal to how we view dance on stage, which is a wide angle shot, we might actually be more true to the nature of the work by using close ups and camera movement to gain certain dynamics, energy, and feelings.’ A prime example was English National Ballet’s Winter 2020 digital season, which saw choreographers who were supposed to show work as part of their Reunion programme at Sadler’s Wells – including Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Akram Khan, Stina Quagabeur and Russell Maliphant – collaborate with directors to reimagine their creations for screen.

Challenges

While more sustainable through the global pandemic, screendance is still facing challenges. ‘Makers can’t assemble large casts of dancers and technicians together,’ says Hayes. As a result, many have resorted to low-tech models and collaborated at a distance using methods such as the exquisite corpse. ‘It’s kind of a collage effect, where one person will contribute a segment,


Photo © Franck Boulègue

send it down to the next person, and make it almost like a chain letter.' While this method has achieved viral success on social media – take Matthew Bourne's reimagining of his production *The Red Shoes* as an example – it is questionable whether these types of films would be able to find other modes of distribution. 'High-tech aesthetic values are still important to a lot of film festivals,' says Hayes.

Methods of presentation have also altered. 'It's not just theatre people who are missing out on live performances, film people are missing the excellent conditions of seeing a cinema screening and the collective experience that that represents,' says Hayes. 'An overwhelming majority of screendance works are intended to be shown in a cinema: just because they are moving images doesn't mean they can be transplanted onto the internet,' she adds. 'You also have installations where there may be another visual element or sound element that accompanies the work. You wouldn't be able to propose that sort of setup online.'

The need for curation

As a result, curators of virtual screendance festivals need to think carefully about whether the work they feature will lose certain qualities in a digital context. 'Curated programmes are constructed with care. They allow us to develop a certain line of thought, explore a certain theme, and to contextualise work in a certain way, maybe accompanied by presentations, conversations, or text,' says Hayes.

Kappenberg was involved in two such curated festivals during lockdown last year. Grounded, her own online season of screendance, was hosted by Coastal Currents (UK) and co-curated by Fiontán Moran from the Tate Modern. 'The audience numbered roughly 1600 people for the five programmes we presented. We could never have achieved this in a cinema in Brighton or London.'

Kappenberg was also involved in South East Dance's Vision 2020 programme, which saw artists from the UK organisation's autumn season recommend screendance works to be shared on their website with written commentaries. 'I was part of one of the programmes' online conversations with Cara Hagan, who was in the US at the time. People from as far afield as Argentina joined us,' she says. 'We were a completely

international group talking together on screen. It was very beautiful, this sense of community.'

Not all online screendance videos are part of intricately curated programmes. The alternative sees individual artists upload their works to 'websites like YouTube, where you are free to look and discover, which can be really interesting,' says Hayes. In this context, however, Brown is concerned that 'the audience may be fickle, that works aren't seen in their entirety, and that great works may get lost in the vastness of the internet.'

Digital fatigue

With so many online dance offerings available, many audiences are developing 'digital fatigue.' 'I've noticed it myself. People have sent me links to streamings that I know are going to be good, but for the three hours I have free in the evening, I don't want to be looking at a computer screen before I work on it again in the morning,' says Brown. She does concede that 'younger people are already used to watching things online, I think it's more natural for them.'

In order to combat 'digital fatigue,' a process of helping audiences to become 'screendance literate' may be in order. 'One of the biggest risks that we run is audiences not appreciating to what extent the camera and the editing are part of the choreographic process,' says Hayes. 'These days, they are often done by the dancers themselves, who bring a certain choreographic gaze and understanding to the project.' Yet Kappenberg thinks we should not underestimate audiences. 'There are a lot of literate audiences out there. We all understand we are in a difficult time. The whole world has had to change. Perhaps this sense of looking anew is something people are more prepared to do.'

Post-pandemic?

But what will happen after the pandemic eventually ends? Will screendance return to cinemas and leave the online realm it has been adapting to? 'I really hope that we'll be able and maintain some of the positive aspects of streaming technology in terms of accessibility and reaching different audiences,' says Hayes. Her festival in Burgundy, for example, is hoping to re-establish in person showings and workshops, but offer online alternatives for those unable to travel for budgetary and geographic reasons.

And what of screendance's new audiences? Will their pandemic-induced interest in the art form continue once theatres reopen? Or will it have been a temporary substitute for the live experience? I think we'll see a decrease in online screenings, as people will be keen to swap sofas for plush velvet theatre or cinema seats. But of necessity, makers and audiences have realised the potential of screendance as a medium, and have become more adept at producing high quality artworks: compare the grainy videos we saw back in March 2020 of creatives choreographing in their living rooms to the slick, edited films we're now being presented with. One can only imagine what strides forward we may witness over the months of Covid restrictions to come. •

Of necessity, makers and audiences have realised the potential of screendance as a medium

Circulating artists, defunded infrastructures



Yasen Vasilev
28 January 2021

Don't just blame Covid for this crisis: restructuring the cultural field had already led to more artists and fewer resources

Privileged and precarious

My Instagram feed looks cool. Some friends, unaware of the reality of performing arts in Europe, tell me this is what success must look like. Before the pandemic, I had been travelling continuously over the last five years – and while doing so, I gradually began to think about working conditions, budget cuts, infrastructure, access and policy. For quite some time already, the question in the field – at least for those lucky enough to be residents in Europe – has been not who can afford to travel, but on the contrary, who can afford not to travel and still work? Cultural workers are circulating the global markets just like commodities. They are in the peculiar situation of being both privileged and precarious. Privileged, because even the possibility of thinking about a career in the arts already requires a solid social and material base; and because the consequences of that choice are usually hidden behind success stories. Precarious, because freelance work in a stagnated economy with unstable income leads to depression, anxiety, burnout, frustration and sadness, and makes them question their professional choices and capacities within a permanent identity crisis.

> **The question has been not who can afford to travel, but who can afford not to travel and still work?**



An earlier version of this text was originally written in Bulgarian for 'The Hour of Truth' (concept by Alexander Manuiloff, produced by Radar Sofia, Bulgaria, at Derida Stage in 2019) the performance where seven contemporary dramaturges have seven minutes each on stage to speak freely about what is usually not spoken about

Photo: Compagnie Yoann Bourgeois: Celui qui tombe (He Who Falls). © Foteini Christofilopoulu

Austerity and restructuring

This situation has been exposed, but not caused, by the pandemic. At the end of 2019, the government in Flanders announced budget cuts for the cultural sector of 3% on big institutions, 6% on companies and a shocking 60% on project funding. The outcry was immediate; the U-turn came later, packaged as an 'budget increase' when it actually only partially restored the previous amount (half a million euros disappeared), making it probable that the major cuts will return along with 'normality'. To put it bluntly, a whole generation of artists might have to bartend indefinitely in order to practice their profession as a hobby.

But Flanders was late. The slashing of cultural budgets has already been rehearsed across Europe after the 2008 financial crisis. 'Act normal or go away', said Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, whose right-wing government introduced severe cuts back in 2012 to the arts (which populists called a 'leftist hobby'). Dutch authorities have tried to continue the same way even through the pandemic: on 18 November 2020 the production house of Frascati Theater in Amsterdam – which distributes 95% of its funding to emerging artists, and is an important doorway for recent graduates – dramatically announced its closure due to refused corona subsidies. A compromise was eventually struck with the minister of culture, who found some 'crumbs' to cover less than half of the sum they requested. So Frascati continues, on a much smaller scale, for now.

In Barcelona funding used to be entirely structured around the company and production model and some dance companies founded in the 80s, 90s and 2000s achieved enough stability to employ dancers (though the French artist status system never really existed), to rent or even own spaces, keep administrative staff, produce annually and tour internationally. The left-wing Catalan government of 2003–2010 gave the culture sector a vast economic boost, and many dance companies emerged in addition to those already operating. But once austerity took hold in 2011, the dance sector was decimated and the company and production-oriented model collapsed. Companies could no longer keep their own spaces, the production cycle fractured and most dancers and choreographers were forced more than ever into freelancing. Today, there aren't any long-term support schemes and artists have to be ultra flexible and well connected internationally to develop a coherent body of work. For while big countries with national touring circuits like France and Germany can still afford a less internationally integrated scene, Catalan artists are trying to enter the international co-producing and touring system through the revolving doors of Brussels and Vienna.

Norway's national contemporary dance company Carte Blanche, established in 1989 in Bergen, is a notable exception. Like a remnant of another world, its delegated budget can sustain both production and touring, and international co-productions arise not out of funding desperation but for the sake of cultural

A whole generation of artists might have to bartend indefinitely in order to practice their profession as a hobby

exchange. The company employs 14 dancers full-time, with 9–10 permanent contracts, several three-year contracts, and paid one-year apprenticeships for dancers under 24. Salaries are negotiated by union agreements, and they get access to the public Norwegian healthcare and pension systems. To promote decentralisation, the company is seated in Bergen instead of the capital Oslo, and the team of dancers is international. In the words of current director Annabelle Bonnery, 'these are extremely good conditions, incomparable to anywhere else I've worked before.'

Yet even in that oil-rich economy, budgets are being slashed (volunteer programmes, long-term grants for artists, free language courses for foreigners). Across the continent, meanwhile, freelancers are not free, but struggling with insufficient funding and infrastructure, set against one another in constant competition, and juggling with several jobs of different registers. Only the most adaptable remain in this self-destructive race.

The East as a roadmap for the West

Of course, these processes are not lived as the disasters they are. On the contrary, they are sold as liberation from outdated systems, styles and hierarchies. Young artists traditionally – and rightly – position themselves in opposition to previous generations, ethically and aesthetically, but short-sighted reforms often come with worsening working conditions. No one knows that better than the Eastern European countries whose public sector was cheerfully defunded and privatised in the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Germany is a notable exception, though critics often point out that funding mainly goes to big institutions and doesn't necessarily trickle down to individual artists. Supranational funding coming from the EU can hardly replace the role of ministries of culture – its recently announced increased budget for a seven-year period for 27 member states is roughly the same as Germany's annual budget. Still, the exceptions prove the rule that well-developed national cultural policies which soften market forces are being bulldozed by the mantras of freedom and entrepreneurship, repeated until it erases the truth that resources in the sector are much fewer not because we are poorer but because the ruling elite considers art and culture a waste – not even a threat any more.

Privatisation of structural problems

These ever-shrinking subsidies are being distributed with increasing bureaucracy, tighter deadlines and permanent application cycles, requiring artists constantly to argue for their own existence and beg for their means of survival, while at the same time creating an immense amount of additional unpaid admin work. Before the formal establishment in the late 80s of the structures we see in crisis today, strong artistic groups and movements had formed around people, places and ideas with an underground, do-it-yourself spirit – like Judson Church in New York, Odin Teatret in Denmark, the Flemish

These processes are not lived as the disasters they are, but sold as liberation from outdated systems, styles and hierarchies



new wave – though always in conditions that allowed their basic material survival, whether that be the availability of space in post-industrial cities, or unusually liberal local governments willing to fund the arts. Back then it was still possible to do weird, messy, experimental stuff outside the market. Today this is no longer the case: cities have gentrified, living costs increased while wages stagnated and capitalistic logic has infiltrated everything from institutions to friendships. There is incessant mobility, lack of resources, constant global competition for better professional opportunities elsewhere. To a large extent, this whole ideology has become internalised: many art students are already depressed even before graduation. They might not be able to articulate or analyse the conditions, but they know with their bodies and minds that their future has been cancelled.

Commodification of education

Unlike the students in the 80s who had access to cheap housing, free education and a fertile soil to invent opportunities for themselves in an undeveloped and less crowded artistic field, the students of today are crushed by student debt, rising housing costs and the gig economy

> **The result is a closed circuit of exchanged practices where contemporary dance becomes impenetrable for regular audiences**



With thanks also to Oscar Dasí, Alexis Euspierre, Annabelle Bonnéry, Annette Van Zwoll, Clàudia Brufau and Oonagh Duckworth for their advice

Further reading

Flanders Arts Institute, 'Re-framing the international', report about working internationally in the arts: kunsten.be/en/publications/kunstenpocket-2-reframing-the-international

On the French system: etui.org/publications/art-managing-intermittent-artist-status-france

Artsy, 'Inside New York's last remaining artists' housing' artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-inside-new-yorks-remaining-artists-housing

– pressures intensified by social media, the democratisation of art practice, and the blurring of differences between art, creativity and entertainment. They're taught to become entrepreneurs, to run their own micro-businesses and to establish their names as brands on the internet. Universities sell dreams to future project managers who then often hit a wall, unprepared for the harsh reality of the economy. The number of applications from emerging independent choreographers to the Aerowaves Europe dance platform has tripled in the last decade (from 200 to 600), a striking indicator of the sudden expansion of a field unprepared to accommodate them. We see the rise of bullshit jobs in the form of unpaid internships, or festivals and residencies requesting artists to pay to work. With dwindling professional opportunities and growing numbers graduating with dance degrees, a lot of artists turn to teaching as a source of income, in self-run paid workshops, intensives or as part of the academic precariat (higher education having undergone a similar restructuring). The result is a closed circuit of exchanged practices where contemporary dance becomes impenetrable for regular audiences. The motto of B12 in Berlin, a self-proclaimed 'workshop festival', sums it up pretty well: research or die.

Economy as ideology

The financial crisis is an ideological question, not just an economic one. A coordinated attack against arts, humanitarian disciplines and public spending hides its true motives behind economic arguments. Budget cuts are presented as liberalisation, the sector as consisting of elitists wasting resources, and market success as the measure of worth for public support. Thus critical voices are silenced, taking risks is discouraged, and art is marginalised and replaced by forms of entertainment. It has come to the point where even the critique of these processes is dysfunctional: it will never be able to strengthen the argument of culture as a public good by adopting the same economic jargon, nor by instrumentalising art to fit into EU boxes that frame it as an extension of social and community practice, which is part of the same logic that pushes these austerity policies in the first place.

Outside eye, sinking ship

In the field of dance, the dramaturg is called 'the outside eye', simultaneously inside the process and detached from it. Their job is to observe and analyse the direction things take, to have a view of the whole even before it's fully formed. In that sense, I believe that the practice of artists today is to a large extent centred in active dramaturgical observation and analysis of the world we live in. It includes navigating between institutions and contexts and using resources and opportunities in a subversive way. It includes exercises in self-organisation, strategies for collective action, invention of critical languages, practices of care and repair. For – accelerated by the pandemic – the ship is sinking. If we don't find a way together to stop the incoming water, if we don't take care of those thrown overboard – if we don't imagine, and build, a new ship – it's all lost. •

Beyond the visual
Johanna Hedva's Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain

Claire Lefèvre
11 February 2021

As live arts migrate to the screen, Claire Lefèvre wonders whether a book might more fully reawaken the aura of live performance

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Audiobook: 47 tracks, 4 hrs 46 min
Available from Parrhesiades

What do you miss about attending a live performance?

Is it really about seeing something? Or about sensing, imagining, congregating? For me, it is the way goosebumps rise on my forearms when someone's voice hits a note that pierces right through my bones. Or the scent of cigarette smoke and niche fragrances rushing through my nostrils as I hug my hip artsy friends hello. Or the magical way artificial smoke transforms any black box into an enchanted place.

While it is currently impossible to gather in a dark room with a bunch of savvy strangers, most theatres have switched to online programmes, offering a plethora of digital and mostly free content. Video formats, both live and pre-recorded, seem to be the substitute of choice for theatre and dance performances throughout the Covid-19 catastrophe. However, the monopoly of the visual realm can greatly flatten the multi sensorial experience of spectatorship. Moreover, video documentation isn't always the best choice to archive more experimental formats such as durational or participative works, which require the kind of focus one can hardly muster from across a screen.

While some viewers are eager for more advanced technologies to replicate the experience of live art, such as 3D glasses and other Virtual Reality experiences, others desire to detach from the digital world all together.: In case you too miss performances but could use a break from staring at your laptop, I recommend Johanna Hedva's latest book *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain*, a razor-sharp and visceral substitute to visiting the theatre in person.

A writer, artist, musician and astrologer living in LA and Berlin, Hedva is well known for their 'sick woman theory' essay as well as their performances, their novel *On Hell* or their widely shared 'disability access rider'. A retrospective of the last 10 years of their work, *Minerva* feels like a detailed archive, a performance study textbook rich with countless gems on making art, an intimate journal and collection of spells all at once.

Especially striking is the textured and graphic precision with which Hedva depicts past performances. Descriptive paragraphs are juxtaposed with archive photographs, illustrations by Isabelle Albuquerque and blank pages, giving readers plenty of time to breathe and to imagine the work in their minds, to let the words and pictures resonate in their skulls.

When describing their work, Hedva infuses their summary with insight on the intimate, and at times disastrous, relationships



Myrrhia Reed as UNRAVELER in Johanna Hedvig's *Motherload* (2012), CalArts, Santa Clarita, California, USA
Photo © Wojciech Kosma

they weave with their co-workers – 'the only performer who's appeared in all four plays is Claire Kohne. (She and I don't talk anymore)' – with tragic personal stories – 'When I started the Greek cycle I was just divorced, fresh out of the psych ward, and bleeding black dust from a deceased uterus that had killed the only child I'll ever have' – and with reflected self-criticism: 'I wholeheartedly believed that I could make a neutral, ahistoric ground upon which the work could emerge, newborn, pure, limitless. How beautiful and stupid youth is.' The reader dives right into the creative process with the artist, witnessing the intricate way they weave together personal and political: there is no palatable work-life balance in sight, and this way of shattering the line between what is labour and what is not is possibly what transforms *Minerva* from a contemplative catalogue to a tender, poignant and radical read.

'*what I needed to make Motherload (an inconclusive list): tragedy, Euripides, Anne Carson, the Noh theatre, lots and lots of paper, being involuntarily hospitalized by a boyfriend, flowers, the history of Western civilization, a miscarriage.*'

In *Minerva*, it becomes clear how Hedva's political essays, which challenge patriarchal, capitalist and ableist systems of oppression, translate in their artistic practice as well: sleep is work, grief is work, healing is work, eroticism is exhausting, heartbreak is as valid as rehearsals in making a project come to life, being joyous in a gender-fluid body is a political protest.

Archiving not only the performances themselves, but also the entire process of making them come to life, *Minerva the Miscarriage of the Brain* feels like the artist is holding your hand gently and giving you a guided tour of their brain, showing you where all the memories are stored, where the juices flow, visiting the softest place inside of their bones and exiting through the guts. Hedva's book gives a perspective on their performance work that video documentation could never capture: through their vivid recollection of events, they offer a delicately raw glimpse into their practice. By awakening the sensual imagination, it becomes a vivid, embodied experience that takes the reader behind and beyond the scene. And while it may not be live art, but it is nothing short of spectacular. •

Dance classes through the screen

Experiences of participation online

15 April 2021

It can be really hard to take dance classes when your ‘studio’ is your sitting room, bedroom, kitchen or (lucky you) garden. Some people stop physical classes altogether, others turn to those that focus on conditioning and fitness. Yet there are many online dance classes, and more and more participants are learning that geography has become, well, history: nowadays, time zone seems more of a limit than geolocation.

We asked our Springback contributors about their experiences of online dance classes, and what works (or doesn’t) through the medium of the screen.

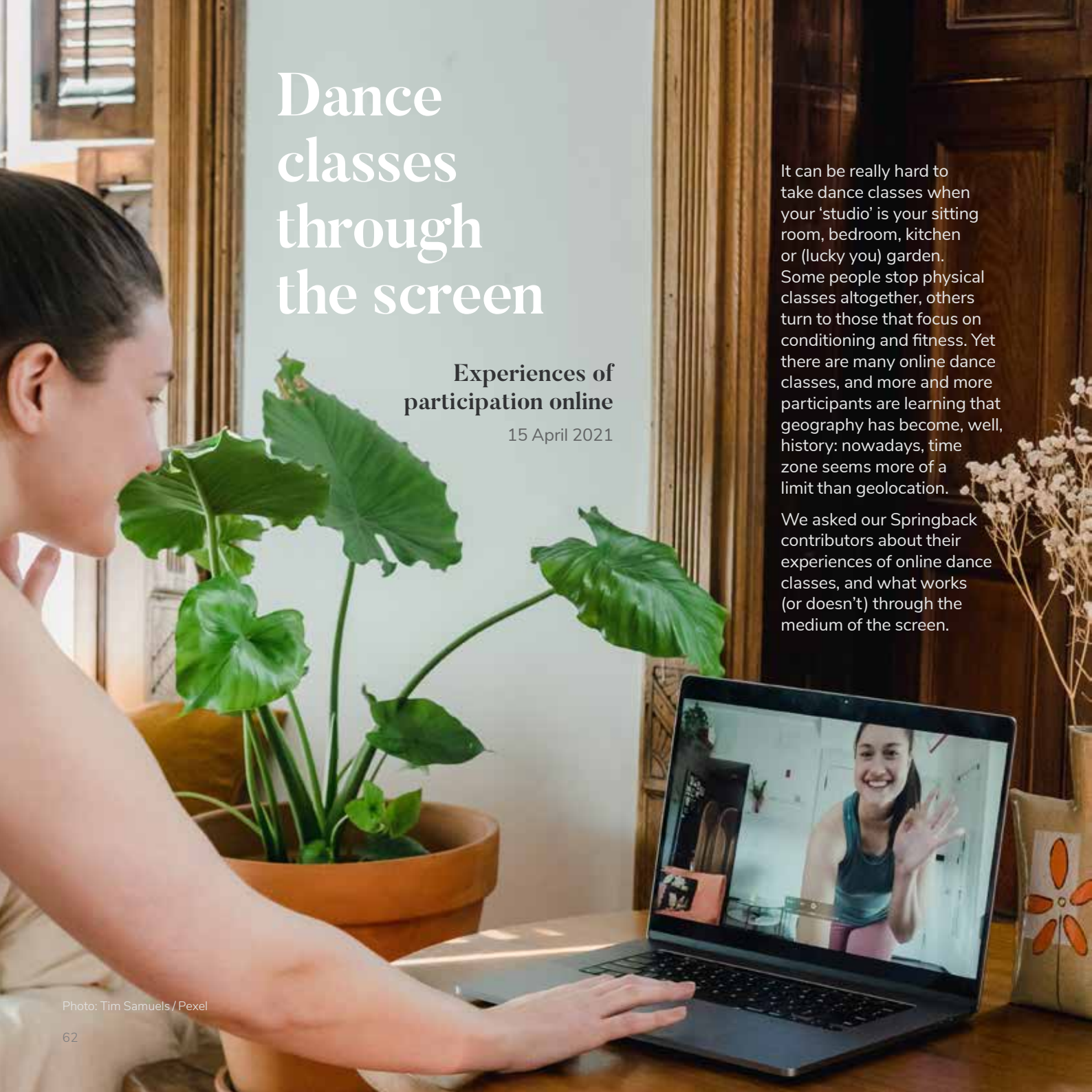


Photo: Tim Samuels / Pexel

Go Gaga

Alfredo Miralles

A sure-fire hit among lockdown dance classes has been Batsheva's 'Gaga Online': more than 14,000 participants and 200,000 euros collected to support the teachers (with no other income at that time). Its success was not due to solidarity or to the nonexistence of geographical boundaries, but to the dance language itself. Ohad Naharin created his Gaga technique in the early 2000s, and it turned out to be the perfect match for online sessions. In these classes all the instructions are oral, so participants don't have to look to the screen all the time to follow the dynamics. It's possible to listen, eyes closed, and dance through the images to wake up our body awareness and connect with our own movement from the sensation, not the shape. This allows everyone to attend these classes. Some lessons are even designed to be taken sitting in a chair. No experience or space requirements, just imagination.

gagapeople.com/en/ongoing-classes/

Right Hooks

Kosta Karakashyan

Galen Hooks is among the world's most prolific commercial choreographers, with credits including Justin Bieber, Janet Jackson, Britney Spears, Usher, Ne-Yo and John Legend. Her online classes offer dancers of all levels a rare professional glimpse into the hard-earned skillset that makes for dancers who can perform with rigour and consistency across different situations and styles. The classes are of two types: choreography routines optimised for exploring your personal approach, and thematic lectures such as 'How to Retain Choreography' and 'How to Use Your Face'. Instead of just teaching movement, Hooks offers specific strategies for more embodied learning, connecting emotion to performance and monitoring when our thoughts get in the way. While her choreography challenges you with specific details and precise timing, it still holds space to fill in with your own lived experiences. This type of nuanced learning and experimenting is perfect for the intimate setting that online classes offer.

galenhooks.com/ghm-digital
youtube.com/watch?v=UCSWc3xP8d4

Space barre

Suzanne Frost

Every time they lock us up, I find myself back at the ballet barre. There's something just so instantly stress-relieving about doing that old adage. After trying this and that online, I settled into Norwegian National Ballet's streamed classes on Facebook. For an ex-professional, it can be hard to determine your level: the body is obviously not doing what it used to any more, yet you still want enough pace and challenge not to get bored. I like the no-nonsense Scandinavian calm of Jahn Magnus Johansen, the fabulous light-flooded studios in Oslo, and most of all Joey McNamara on the piano never failing to lift me up with his arrangements of Elton John or Lady Gaga. It's gentle on the old bones and big on boosting endorphins. I bow out after the barre – allegro is for those without downstairs neighbours...

facebook.com/groups/837489283392085//

Every time they lock us up, I find myself back at the ballet barre

Missing the loops
Róisín O'Brien

Spinal roll downs. Floor warm up. Pliés. A longer final sequence. Belongings pushed to one side, the teacher faces us from their living room (or hallway?) and leads a release-based class for DanceBase in Edinburgh. The focus is on teaching steps rather than improvising. Although improvisation – inherently adaptive, consciously reconnective with the body – makes sense in our home 'studios', this challenge draws me in.

And wow, did I struggle. A year away from a studio has no doubt dulled my ability to keep up, but there are also some feedback loops missing. Each sequence is created for a small space, yet I continue to mark them, and so cut down on those information-rich signals within the body that leap from extremities to the centre and back again. There is less pressure to be present and attuned – so, I am less present and attuned. Embodied knowledge feels acutely three-dimensional, less a string of instructions or visual cues, but a morphing, breathing thing, hovering at the edge of my laptop screen.

Coffee morning
Anna Kaszuba

MOVE IT! This might sound a little dictatorial for a 9 am pre-coffee start, but Keir Patrick's approach to movement is more 'gentle motivation' than 'military operation'. Two mornings a week, Patrick invites anybody who's feeling the stultifying effects of lockdowns to stretch and strengthen using sequences inspired by pilates, yoga and dance. The mindful, physical inventory wakes up my entire body in a space no bigger than a yoga mat, while Patrick's lightness, humour and clarity of instruction allows me to turn my attention to sensation rather than the screen. From rolling out of bed to rolling my ankles, my commute to feeling energised for the day feels like teleportation. Hmm, perhaps I won't be needing that morning coffee after all...

Take the floor
Stella Mastorosteriou

I first discovered Mathilde Gilhet on Instagram, where she shares daily videos showcasing her distinct floorwork moves with quirky names, like The Bionic Jellyfish and Butt Wiggling Pounce. In her online floorwork/contemporary dance class she gives detailed tutorials of some of those moves and frames them into longer dance sequences. The class is lots of fun, thoroughly technical, high energy and low cost. Although the class does not happen on a regular basis and is attended by hundreds worldwide each time, Gilhet manages to create a sense of community and continuity through Instagram, where she reposts daily stories by class participants trying out her tricks. There is another notable aspect of the WE class: all proceeds from each class go towards funding an artistic project by an emerging mover, selected through an open call.

we-program.com/
instagram.com/mathildegilhet/



Attention turns to sensation rather than the screen



Mathilde Gilhet.
Photo © Arthur Häberli

Guilty secret
Lydia Wharf

Guilty secret: for the past few years I have attended Zumba classes; first in a local village hall and more recently in my living room. As a dance form, Zumba isn't even 'a thing': it's a kind of aerobics via South America (but not a direct flight), it's a trademark, a musical mishmash, it flogs 'merch' and instructor courses. My class attracts an all-female group of enthusiasts in lycra leisurewear, with the collective aim of losing weight and throwing vigorous shapes. And oh, how we love it! This form of dance somehow simultaneously engages retired octogenarian Gladys, two teenagers who always request a grime track at the end, and me, the contemporary dance snob. We laugh, we sweat, we accidentally unmute, we dance together and it feels so good. During lockdown it's a lifeline, connecting me to a range of people I no longer see or share space with. The delivery is different, but the 'Latin vibes' live on.

Bring a friend
Rachel Burke

I've signed up. I've logged on. I've pliéd at my fireplace. Stuck to my kitchen lino trying to tap. Discovered I'm a haphazard vacuumer, mid intense spinal roll. Felt the harsh boundary of a downward dog when all I really wanted was a bit of wild freedom. As the months have worn on, my interest in any online offering has well and truly worn off. I've realised the best thing I can do is just close the screen and not feel bad about it. Instead, I have moved IRL in ways that feel right, for now, and found a few rarely visited spaces within myself along the way.

One thing I have learned: if you must do an online class, bring a friend along. Share an awkward glance across the screen and giggle together afterwards about your rusty movement recall. Anything to find that moment of connection and magic that I so desperately miss from live dance!

The memeing of dance

Emily May
04 May 2021

Dance memes may be common, but few emerge from within the contemporary dance world. Enter Mr Felden Krisis...

Images courtesy of @somatic_based_content_only

Ever since I first joined Facebook back in 2009, I've been sent memes – defined by Collins Dictionary as 'humorous images, videos or pieces of text that spread very quickly on the internet, often being changed by different users' – by my non-dance friends. From photographs of squirrels in dramatic positions captioned 'people will stop asking you questions if you start answering back in interpretive dance', to images of sharp-suited businessmen answering the question 'how would you describe yourself?' with '...verbally, but I've also prepared a dance' – all of them treated dance in a way that I found naive. They seemed to be created by 'muggles' who thought of dance as an artform in which people spend their days pretending to be trees – laughing at, rather than with a form they knew little about. As any member of the dance community knows, the industry is more complex and crazy than non-dancers imagine... and has way better meme fodder than any dancing squirrel I've seen.

Cue @somatic_based_content_only, the contemporary dance meme outlet I – and clearly many others – have been waiting for. Publishing its first ever post on Instagram at the beginning of February 2021, the account adapts existing mainstream meme templates – such as the Drake Hotline Bling and Kermit the Frog memes – and recontextualises them for a contemporary dance audience. Tapping niche experiences and knowledge, the



posts make fun of dancers, choreographers, teachers and institutions alike, recasting Bernie Sanders as an improvisation teacher asking you to 'once again to connect from your sacrums', and adapting the popular 'they don't even know' meme to show a man at a party annoyed that his friends don't realise that 'Beyoncé stole most of her choreography for *Countdown* from Anne Teresa de Keersmaker and later said she was inspired.' Oof, I related hard to the latter meme, having passionately shared this fact at many social gatherings.

Having accrued around 4000 followers after only one month of operation, @somatic_based_content_only's audience now tops 9.8K. 'I was pretty shocked,' says 'Mr Felden Krisis' (as the account's founder

is known) via email. 'This was supposed to be a brief-lived anonymous account that I could turn to when there was a really important application I wanted to put off finishing for as long as possible.'

While Krisis (as I shall call them) credits popular early followers such as @biscuitballerina for attracting the account's audience, there was also a wider context. 'The current restrictions due to the global pandemic have a lot to do with why it's gained attention… memes can offer a collective release.' The emergence of humorous content in a sector that can take itself very seriously also suggests many dancers were excited to break free from their earnest 'performance faces' and laugh at some of their industry's quirks.

'I don't want to throw everyone under the bus for being singularly unfunny,' says Krisis. 'But I guess we all have experienced working with someone who has worked for a "very important choreographer" and who talks in very hushed tones about when they first received the gospel of Ohad / Pina / Bill / Merce / Steve / Jiří / Mats' (that's Naharin, Bausch, Forsythe, Cunningham, Paxton, Kylián and Ek to you non-dance people). 'Especially if these "prophets" are dead there's this suggestion that "their presence is here with us right now" or "they appeared to me last night like the Virgin Mary on a cheese sandwich". I think it's good to try and temper down all that reverence.'

The coronavirus crisis has also revealed some of the 'glaring failures' of the dance industry's current systems, and some of Krisis's memes act as a form of biting institutional critique. Though presented in a comical context – a meme depicting a stressed, sweating superhero struggling to choose between pressing one of two buttons, both labelled 'hiring a white male choreographer,' for example – they are not merely laughing matters.

'It's not exactly a joke that almost no major European dance company has ever employed a female-identifying BiPOC choreographer. I mean, really not at all,' they say. While Krisis believes 'a meme can be an indictment,' they stress that memes are not the same as direct action. 'They often have a pretty strong nihilistic undercurrent. But at the same time, they have a kind of "I thought it, and you said it" mentality. Memes provide a way for people to share ideas amongst each other without them having to articulate those ideas for themselves.'

Using meme culture to criticise institutions, systems and practices is currently more prominent in the field of visual art than contemporary dance. Many accounts, such as @artreviewpower100, @jerrygogosian, and @freeze_magazine (an allusion to leading art magazine *Frieze*) publish daily memes satirising artists, curators, collectors, fairs and institutions alike.

'Memes are relatable by nature and they can be a great vehicle to build bridges between different communities, spread information and share common experiences,' says @freeze_magazine's founder via email, whose identity remained anonymous until they were revealed as Turkish artist Cem A in a recent article by *The New York Times*. 'The contrast between the glamour and the precarity of the art world is probably one of the biggest issues we are facing today. Even if the art market bounces back, somehow the working conditions

> **They appeared to me last night like the Virgin Mary on a cheese sandwich**







in the sector still get worse,' Cem A adds. 'Openly criticising people in the art world is hard. Hopefully, memes help to normalise open and valid criticism.'

The dance world has also had its fair share of problems for years, and it's surprising that critical meme accounts haven't taken off here in the way they have in visual arts. 'There is this very misinformed idea that dancers are "not good at technology" or "digital stuff",' says Krisis. 'Most freelancers edit their own showreels, build their own websites, and successfully manage multiple social media accounts.' Perhaps, they suggest, there is an easier progression from static visuals to bite-sized meme production than there is for dance, an inherently time-based medium. 'I also think there is often the feeling that our world is small. How many people are going to understand a meme about Yvonne Rainer? Or, if I make a meme poking fun at a certain choreographer or a trend in the dance world, is it somehow going to hurt my chances in this already precarious field?'

The fear of being excommunicated from the dance industry hasn't stopped a plethora of high-profile and emerging dance artists from publicly liking and following Krisis's content: their audience includes the likes of London-based choreographers Arthur Pita and Julie Cunningham, English National Ballet junior soloist Precious Adams, Venice Biennale Silver Lion winner Oona Doherty, and even Trisha Brown Dance Company. 'Finally someone has created an account dedicated to how seriously contemporary dance takes itself. It's the account we all need,' says Sarah Blanc, director of all-female inclusive dance theatre company Moxie Brawl. 'It's such fun... I know I have been that dancer on the floor trying to connect my pancreas to the inner workings of socio-economic emergence of the journey of life as it smashes through the outer galactic spatial pattern of the planets as they arrive in Virgo moon while only moving my toe. I wonder if non-dance people find it as funny as us, or if they're like: duh, that's why we laugh at you.'

Looking to the future, Krisis hopes more people will follow their account's Twitter-based sibling, **@somaticbasedscorebot**. 'It's a generative bot that periodically tweets ideas for scores. In my dream world, people will do things with these scores and then share them with me via Twitter or Instagram... *hint*, *hint*.' They also plan to continue making memes for Instagram, 'hopefully without completely destroying my actual life.'

Considering the amount of joy Krisis has brought to me and so many of my danceworld friends who finally 'feel seen', I hope the content keeps coming too. At a time when live performance sometimes seems on the brink of apocalypse, due to both the global pandemic and socio-political movements exposing stark disparities between classes and cultures in every area of society, Krisis's memes have been the catharsis I didn't know I needed, letting me laugh at myself while also contemplating serious issues. They prevent me from feeling overwhelmed, hopeless and defeatist in the face of challenges the industry needs to address, including the homogeneity of choreographers, abusive dance practices, the lack of sustainable funding structures for freelancers – 'and of course Labanotation. Squiggle, line, dot, shape. Please spare me! Spare all of us,' says Krisis. 'We have videos. And I mean, should we really be restaging *Hexentanz* anyway?' •

REVIEWS



Sands of time

Capturing Bausch's Rite of Spring before lockdown

Ka Bradley
06 July 2020

A rehearsal for a performance that never was – École des Sables' Rite of Spring catches a moment in time

The year 2020 is as banded as a hornet. There is the time 'before', its ending delineated by international lockdowns; there is 'now', through which we uncertainly venture, tweeting guesswork visions of the future at one another; and there is that 'future', the shape of which remains difficult to visualise. How the dance community will shift into its new, post-viral future remains uncertain, as we continue to grapple with the question of how to keep sharing, making and supporting work in the 'now'.

Companies and venues have turned to video platforms to connect with audiences. The Digital Stage of London's Sadler's Wells Theatre, offering performances and workshops since 27 March 2020, presented *Dancing at Dusk – A moment with Pina Bausch's The Rite of Spring*, a filmed outdoor rehearsal of a performance of *The Rite of Spring* that never was.

A co-production between Germaine Acogny's École des Sables in Senegal, the Pina Bausch Foundation and Sadler's Wells, its 38 dancers from



Photo © Florian Heinzen-Ziob

> **The world of *The Rite of Spring* bleeds into our own**

14 African countries had planned to premiere in March 2020 in Dakar, before embarking on an international tour. This was, of course, the month that governments worldwide banned large-scale gatherings and performances, and lockdowns of varying stringency came in, ending the 'before' time. The company had time to film one last rehearsal, on a beach in Toubab Dialaw.

It was also the first release on the Digital Stage with paid audience tickets, an acknowledgement that the free access model is not sustainable. Proceeds supported the artists, Sadler's Wells and the future life of the production. For the price of a London pint (£5), audiences all over the world – many of whom would not have been able to see the live performances – could see something that could only have happened in that flash of a moment between 'before' and 'now', as well as a rehearsal of a great work of art.

A raw, visceral piece about the sacrifice of a maiden – chosen in a writhing, heaving ritual that sees her handed a symbolism-drenched red dress – Bausch's 1975 *Rite of Spring*, is a searing work even on a stage. Earth is specially laid, giving the impression of a wild outdoor space, spraying into the air where it is kicked, soiling the bodies and faces of dancers collapsing down into it.

In *Dancing at Dusk*, the carefully raked sand demarcates the 'stage' yet still blends seamlessly with the rest of the beach. The world of *The Rite of Spring* bleeds into our own; performance is indistinguishable from living experience. This production was, like every other production of *The Rite of Spring*, intended to be performed in theatres. Brought in to the open air – into the world – the bladed edge of the ritual feels real and dangerous.

The sky is huge, a murky antique pink fading into livid violet. Director and editor Florian Heinzen-Ziob often uses long horizontal pans, as if following the progress of a slowly, nervously scanning single spectator who has stumbled on to a genuine ritual. The dancer's diaphanous dresses blow in the wind; the sun slowly goes down on the world as the sacrifice dances to death. Unexpectedly, this rehearsal has an emotional veracity that simply cannot be captured in a theatre.

Dancing at Dusk was filmed before social distancing measures were put in place, so it is terribly poignant, even nostalgic to see bodies not just touching but colliding, grappling and entwining. These dancers would soon have to go in separate directions, unsure of when they would even be able to go to class again, let alone rehearse or perform. Spring, the season of renewal, was folded back, trapped at home, until it turned into a similarly unmoving summer; the setting sun of the film sets on 'before' and 'now' begins. At home, as we ease into 'future', the primordial physical energy of the performances are a throwback to what bodies could once do – but when will they be able to again, and on this scale?

Dancing at Dusk is a striking and moving offering, not just because it is a filmed rehearsal of a version of *The Rite of Spring* that never was, but because it sits exactly on the liminal space between the 'before' and the 'now'. The weird magic of its happening feels like intrinsic proof, in and of itself, that art is vital in a way that goes beyond reason and lands in instinct, need, magnetism.

Pere Faura: Rèquiem Nocturn

Clàudia Brufau
01 August 2020

An extravagant tribute to Bob Fosse mixes mortality with showbiz and mundane life

Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona, Spain

'It's showtime, folks!' says Joe Gideon in Bob Fosse's film *All That Jazz* (1979). Catalan choreographer Pere Faura had planned his farewell to dance as a tribute to Fosse's artistic universe, but the Covid-19 outbreak brought another layer to the work: death. The result, Rèquiem Nocturn, feels like three or even more shows in one two-hour extravaganza glitzed up by playful text, brilliant video projections, live music by Telemann Rec, and Faura's sharp wit.

'Lord, have mercy','We want a job, not eternal rest'. At the opening of *Rèquiem Nocturn* the ten performers – nine dancers and an actress – chant in Latin, in a kind of affirmative liturgical mass on the dancers' right to work. On screen, Faura's audition is juxtaposed with Fosse's in *All That Jazz*. Against this sea of ready bodies and eager faces, the performers come on stage into the spotlight, telling us their names and personal stories.

There's always razzle-dazzle: the piece keeps the whole ensemble active, walking across the stage or practising Fosse's angular and sensual movements. When actress Gloria March reminds us how often Fosse has been plagiarised by pop singers such as Michael Jackson and Beyoncé, the dancers demonstrate the original choreography. But the climax comes with Victor Pérez Armero emulating Fosse's snake dance from *The Little Prince* (1974). Hypnotising and tender.



Rehearsal and hospital scenes from *All That Jazz* are both projected and dubbed live by the performers, with hilarious dialogues about the lockdown in general and its impact on *Rèquiem Nocturn* in particular. Death becomes the protagonist as dancer Montse Colomé first tells about how she took care of her friends dying of Aids in the eighties, then well-known Catalan actor Pere Arquillué makes an entrance to deliver a sermon about how words always end up beating movement. A cloud of dancers follow the speakers, like figures in a religious tableau.

Loaded with solemnity and grandiloquence, Rèquiem Nocturn is an enduring and extravagant tale about the crossroads between mortality and the daily life of performers.

The bottom line: A multipurpose, multilayered requiem powdered with razzle dazzle – and all that jazz

Conceived, directed and choreographed by: Pere Faura / Stage concept and venue: Jordi Queralt / Dramaturgy advisor: Marc Angelet / Composer and conductor: Aurora Bauzà, Pere Jou (Telemann Rec) / Dancing performed by: Odo Cabot, Montse Colomer, Raffaella Crapio, Mario Garcia, Júlia Irango, Anamaria Klajnescek, Gloria March, Víctor Pérez Armero, Toni Viñals, Guillermo Weickert / In cooperation with: Pere Arquillué / Music performed by: Aurora Bauzà, Pere Jou / Videocreators: Sergi Faustino / Lighting design: Cube.bz / Costume design: Adriana Parra / Technical coordinator: Arnau Sala / Sound space: Stéphane Carteaux / Assistant director: Anna Serrano / Assistant choreographer: Claudia SolWat / Executive producer: Clara Giménez (BlancProduccions) / Administrator: Joan Gay / Translations from latin: Neus Faura / Training student (Institut del Teatre): Vicente Roldán /Photography: Tristán Pérez-Martín

Peeping Tom: The Missing Door, The Lost Room

Clàudia Brufau
03 August 2020

Works in mysterious ways: two pieces by Belgian physical theatre company Peeping Tom

Grec Festival, Barcelona, Spain

Agatha Christie meets Wes Anderson and forties' film noir in a diptych by Belgian company Peeping Tom (one of the few international visitors to Barcelona's Grec festival, where pandemic restrictions have forced a focus on local companies).

The Missing Door opens with a man dragging a woman's body through a battered hallway; so much has happened before we enter the scene. A footman and chambermaid dash about, mopping the floor and walls. Why are they cleaning so impetuously? The woman lying lifeless at the beginning now struggles with a man who corners her into a shabby armchair. Later, a jaw-dropping duet: a man, holding a woman by her legs, spins her like a ragdoll. Contorting bodies exude pain, tamped by the locked doors of the hallway (just after our real-life lockdown, this felt palpably suffocating). Raphaëlle Latini's score jumps back and forward, underlining the tension and non-linear time of the scenes. By the end, the woman is back on the floor; the footman diligently pulls her off stage.

Technicians change the set in full view: different wall colours and furniture but the same macabre air and hopeless characters. Welcome to *The Lost Room*, a cabin on a ship where dancers emerge and vanish through doors and furniture. Zombie performers inside a wardrobe are swallowed by doors at the opposite end of the room. A woman and a man entangle bendy bodies to become a beautiful hairy octopus, rolling across the cabin. A door, seeming to sense the embarrassment of a chambermaid, sucks her in and spits her out in undergarments. A man finds her frozen and puts her in bed – from which she disappears. Another couple mourn their dead child as a flash captures a woman, lit like a vampire, rocking a baby.

Accumulating perturbing images, hints of the characters' past and their unspeakable fears and desires, the work ends in enigma – as if you had woken from a murder mystery dream just before finding out whodunnit. Frustrating, sinister, and terribly amusing.

The bottom line: Physical theatre noir – macabre, fascinating and endlessly enigmatic


© Maarten Vanden Abeele

Concept and direction: Gabriela Carrizo and Franck Chartier / Performance: Konan Dayot, Fons Dhossche, Lauren Langlois, Panos Malactos, Alejandro Moya, Fanny Sage, Eliana Stragapede, Wan-Lun Yu / Artistic assistance: Thomas Michaux / Sound composition and arrangements: Raphaëlle Latini, Ismaël Colombani, Annalena Fröhlich, Louis-Clément Da Costa / Light design: Tom Visser / Set design: Gabriela Carrizo, Justine Bougerol / Costume design: Seoljin Kim, Yi-chun Liu, Louis-Clément Da Costa / Confection costumes: Sara van Meer, Lulu Tikovsky, Wu Bingyan (intern)

Production: Peeping Tom / Co-production: Opéra National de Paris, Opéra de Lille, Tanz Köln, Göteborg Dance and Theatre Festival, Théâtre National Wallonie-Bruxelles, deSingel Antwerp, GREC Festival de Barcelona, Festival Aperto/Fondazione I Teatri (Reggio Emilia), Torinodanza Festival/Teatro Stabile di Torino – Teatro Nazionale (Turin), Dampfzentrale Bern

Urban dance languages at Peepshow Palace

Lucia Fernandez Santoro
Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
03 September 2020

A dialogue on content, context and tradition in urban dance at a corona-proof performance season in Amsterdam

During the months of July and August, Flemish cultural centre de Brakke Grond, theatre collective De Warme Winkel and Julidans curate and host performances and concerts: the Peepshow Palace Festival. A corona-proof setting welcomes audiences daily in an array of booths built around a circular, rotating stage. Just like in the peep shows for adult entertainment, each gets an individual booth to view the shows from, equipped with a chair, disinfectant spray and tissues. With dimmed coloured lights and a slightly awkward atmosphere, Jordi Ribot Thunnissen and Lucia Fernandez Santoro saw four shows connected to ‘urban’ movements, pop culture in the contemporary scene, all indicating how cultural heritages and references co-exist and affect our ways of consuming performances.



Redouan Ait Chitt in *REDO*
Photo © Sjoerd Derine

Shailesh Bahoran/IRCompany – Heritage & REDO

Seen by Lucia Fernandez Santoro & Jordi Ribot Thunnissen

LFS: Shailesh Bahoran and Redouan Ait Chitt present two solos, both directed by Bahoran. The two virtuosic breakdancers bring up identity issues from different standpoints. Always through physical dexterity, two stories are told: Bahoran's mixing traditional dances and hip hop, playing with their symbols and imagery; Ait Chitt's tale of a resilient body defeating social barriers attempts to exceed the cliché connotations of his physical form.

How did you experience Bahoran's solo?

JRT: The title seems to say it all. *Heritage* stems from research into the choreographer's roots. Bahoran asks himself the basic question 'who am I?' and tries to answer by combining movement elements and storytelling features from his different pools of self. Think of India, Suriname, breakdance and popping. Think about precise movement qualities, mythical mimicry, acrobatic jumps and balances.

LFS: Yes, it was fairly acrobatic and impressive in the deftness of execution. Generally, I am quite put off by technique for its own sake. It alienates me from other layers the work may contain. I am not sure if that's because of my trained eye (as a dancer myself, who has seen a fair share of great dancers) or if it's just a matter of taste.

JRT: I was impressed by the bodily tension. From a viewpoint of technique, it's something particularly interesting (and common) to urban dance: how a sequence explodes from an accumulation of tension in the body, like a stone escaping an elastic band. In *Heritage*, Bahoran accumulates and accumulates. The whole solo seems to evolve from a single strand of effort. Within that, Bahoran efficiently navigates through acrobatic sequences – with a long, jackhammer moment as a highlight – and phrases reminiscent of oriental worlds, all accompanied by exaggerated facial expressions, loud breathing and a very dramatic musical background.

That overkill I found offputting, as I – with my white and western gaze – didn't feel the piece needed to be theatrically translated. But then the question is: was that world, or those characters who seemed to possess him at times, part of his heritage or was it a dramaturgical choice to present himself as a persona fighting invisible forces? Was there a story to be followed? To me, his body, not the theatrical reading of its acts, was the place where those diverse pools of self gathered. The combination of pantomime – traditional or not – and choice of music at times overshadowed the power of that physical gathering.

LFS: Indeed, I was lost in the combination of what I saw as dramatic faces and the acrobatics of the body. I surely lack references too, since the gestures I could recognise and 'place' are those that have been absorbed by pop culture. Also the traditional aspect of this work made me think. It was traditional in all senses: with reminiscences of traditional dances from India to Suriname but also with a traditional manner of performing, of showing off physical skills and overdramatised

expressions, a bit like pantomime. Breakdancing too has the tradition of battles and showing skill and power as a performative act.

These thoughts on performative choices bring me to the next solo: *REDO*. Redouan Ait Chitt (commonly known as Redo) is the first hip-hop dancer to earn the Dutch 'Swan' award for best dancer, in 2019. But the award is incidental, really, to a career defined by fought for and well-deserved personal success. The introduction to the performance describes it bluntly: the bets were 0–6 against Redouan at birth. But turning what the world sees as physical disabilities into his defining strengths, Redo has become a prominent international player in changing the narrative around 'disabilities' in dance.

JRT: *REDO* wants to be a powerful tool in this regard. It focuses on the body we are seeing – a body with one hip, a shorter leg, two malformed arms. The solo starts with him illuminating his three-fingered hand with a lamp, then plays with the shadows his prosthetic leg projects. The way this dancer manages his physique to perform is the sole line to be followed. Actually, isn't this the core of every dancer's practice? We train our body to make it play to our advantage. Only, in the case of *REDO*, the uniqueness of his body is more visible, and carries a social and political narrative, a story of empowerment.

LFS: I found myself again limited by my own biased perception. I found it cheesy, and was once more lost by the choreographic direction. I wanted to believe that what I was seeing was not all about his differently abled body. But the dramaturgy, soundtrack and lighting kept reinforcing the feeling that it was just about that.

JRT: I agree some elements can come across as cheesy: the distracting, action-movie soundtrack, or the way the pantomimic links between one choreographic sequence and the next.

Looking at both solos: what bothered you about the overdramatic feel?

LFS: I frequently wonder why concept and physical execution feel so disconnected, or even not related at all. Either the movements feel like a decoration to what the piece is proposing, or the opposite: the conceptual layer feels put on top of virtuosic movements, without adding anything.

JRT: It's interesting that hip-hop based performances designed for the stage often are built into melodramatic settings, closer to pop-culture and TV shows like Dancing with the Stars than to the lines of movement research stemming from western dance stages since the early 1900s. But not surprising: as Trajal Harrell poignantly noted in *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church*, there's an abyss between the social, economic and cultural pools in which postmodern and urban dances have evolved since the sixties. That said, I can't help but feel a sense of lost opportunity when I see this most influential dance current, which has evolved into a myriad physical techniques on the street without needing metaphors, being shaped so often into emotional gimmicks when it jumps onto the stage.

I consider urban movement languages rich and powerful enough to cater for all kinds of choreographic strategies, as in any other major technique



Cherish Menzo: *Jezebel*
Photo © Bas de Brouwer

LFS: A lost opportunity in a way, but isn't it also maybe an effective way to make themselves a space within the elitist context of theatres? I think that pop culture absorbed house dance and hip-hop culture because of their great commercial potential. Hence, this popularity also attracts a broader range of audiences. Is it really a choice between favouring execution over concept, or is it also being subject to the market?

In this respect, I think Cherish Menzo did a fantastic job in *Jezebel*, another piece at the Peepshow: she flirted with gimmicks but as a commentary and not as a narrative tool. But, again, Menzo is very active in the contemporary scene, and perhaps has a differently educated approach to creating for stage.

JRT: I saw Menzo's piece when it premiered back in November 2019, and I agree with you every step of the way. As for the melodramatic tendency of urban performances being demanded by the market, I don't necessarily see it that way. If anything, I assume there's a wish to be popular when creating for the stage, but I also consider urban movement languages rich and powerful enough to cater for all kinds of choreographic strategies, as we see in any other major technique.

But before going further with *Jezebel*, there's a moment I want to talk about in *REDO*. At one point, Ait Chitt stops the

Versatile and consistent, with integrity and generosity, Cherish Menzo is a force on and off stage

action and sits down to put his shoes on. No added sugar to the coffee: we just see his necessarily unconventional, and so very revealing way of putting his shoes on. Vulnerable and honest, not pitiful. After this, the second part of the solo is a series of exploding, awesome phrases taken out of the battlefield for our bafflement. What a joy. When it was over, I thought: what else was needed?

LFS: Exactly, for me the piece only started there, when Redouan puts on his shoe, with no added artifice. Then I became truly engaged and didn't have or need more questions about compositional choices. It was impressive and well executed, and didn't need any extra contextualising.

Cherish Menzo: Jezebel

Seen by Lucia Fernandez Santoro

LFS: Cherish Menzo is for me a great counter-example of composing skilled movements within a rich concept. In this piece, Menzo reminds us of the late 90s, early 00s phenomenon of the 'video vixen' – the much criticised but also acclaimed portrayal of hypersexualised women, often of colour, in hip-hop videos. Skilfully commenting on the manipulation of female bodies by mass media, she reclaims and challenges our perception of that figure. How is this *Jezebel* redefining herself in our current times?

She arrives on a customised BMX bike wearing a fur coat, a thick golden chain around her neck, long fake nails and fluorescent pink crop top and shorts. She moves with power and swiftly navigates through hip-hop characters or characteristics: twerking, strutting confidently, territorial and assertive. A transformation happens as her nails start to fall and she steps into a metallic blow-up body-suit. It inflates progressively, exaggerating the curves of the body, turning the figure into a Botero-like body.

The work is a well-rounded and crafted proposition. I have been following Menzo's work as a performer as well as a maker. Versatile and consistent, with integrity and generosity, she is a force on and off stage.

Dalton Jansen: The Double Lisbeth Gruwez & Maarten van Cauwenberghe: Penelope

Seen by Jordi Ribot

JRT: Lastly, I saw an interesting double bill at Peepshow Palace which serves us well in the context of our conversation.

Dalton Jansen is a choreographer from Rotterdam. In *The Double*, which has an overall feel of what we might loosely call urban contemporary, dancers Terencio Douw and Gihan Koster measure themselves against one another. Starting from the incidental fact that they look alike, Jansen worked with them to go deeper into the implications of mirroring. Jealousy, competitiveness, a wish to excel. While working mainly in synch, both theatrically fight to be seen as individuals, instead of as the one that looks like… or the one that is the opposite from…

Douw and Koster combine the power of their youth with the proficiency of their ability. They toss around, grab one another, chain one dance phrase to the next.

The choreography is neat, an effort has been made to make it possible for them to move as one as much as possible, and for the audience to be able to enjoy them doing so. Yet again, I found myself struggling with the theatrical overkill. Nevertheless, I thought it was a very well made duet, where the dancers brought a lot to the fore and the hand of the choreographer was felt in a way that brought structure and balance. The three got each other; that much was clear.

LFS: I didn't get to see this piece but this emphasis on performing emotions seems to be recurrent in works stemming from urban movement languages. I wonder if it is to do with these expressions being quite new within more art-institutional forms of dance. Are we bothered by what we perceive as artificial emotions simply because we sense a clash between context and content? Works in theatres historically come from a fairly elitist tradition and conceptualist rhetoric. Am I seeking concepts everywhere? The movement techniques referenced by these works originate from a different social urgency than ballet or modern dance. There are other discourses constructed around these movement languages, and we as audiences also need to broaden our own references to enter the works with a different state of mind.

JRT: As I see it, the choice to add this emotional layer could also be a way to adapt to this elitist stage tradition. I go back to my comment about opportunities lost: it's not about me seeing the focus on physical research as the right way to go from battles to the stage, but feeling that that focus is already at the core of these languages. But you make a very good point. Maybe my hope of seeing this clash between content and context become a movement of mingling is only a matter of time.

JRT: In this broader debate, Lisbeth Gruwez very much embodies the last decades of that contemporary, white, western European dance-theatre tradition. Her presence on stage is magnetic, and in her works the constant focus lies on the phenomenon of the human body appearing. Just that: in its duality, both as body and as an emotional and telling entity. In *Penelope*, a ten-minute solo created as an epilogue to *24h* (2017), the all-male Odyssey-opera at the Royal Flemish Theatre, Gruwez turns – like the dervish dancers, like a little girl, like a madman. Her arms move slowly, creating patterns and remnants of recognisable gestures in the air. Gestures related to Homer's Penelope and to all the other women in his pages, silenced under so many words about heroic virility, blood and revenge. Thus, images pop out of the constant spiral: Penelope waiting, Helen in despair, Circe drying a tear with her skirt. But the focus remains on the turning, Gruwez is occupied by it, and the gestures are like ghosts, wilfully aloof and disconnected to what is happening. Rather than acting out emotions to make us believe they are guiding motion, these image-like echoes spill out of it instead. Supported by evenly evocative light and sound design, this ambiguity turns her into something of a dancing myth herself: an ungraspable whirlwind, a symbolic and energetic something in-between.

Are we bothered by what we perceive as artificial emotions? Am I seeking concepts everywhere?

Faye Driscoll: Guided Choreography for the Living and the Dead

Emily May
08 September 2020

‘Audio choreography’ or private therapy session? An event that gets inside you

HAU, Berlin, Germany

‘Bring yourself away from evaluating things visually,’ the American choreographer Faye Driscoll whispers into my ear as I lie on a deckchair in front of the currently closed Hebbel am Ufer theatre. ‘Observe the sensations. Perhaps you don’t feel anything, that’s fine too.’ My eyes drift shut as I prepare for an experience that seems more like a private therapy session than a contemporary dance performance.

A 13-minute ‘audio choreography’ commissioned for Berlin’s Tanz im August 2020, *Guided Choreography for the Living and Dead* is unlike other participatory dance performances: we are not required to leave our seats or even move a muscle while listening to instructions read to us through headphones. Instead, we are encouraged to focus on our internal reactions, sensations, and images that appear in our mind’s eye. As a result, the piece raises an important question: where does performance actually take place? Onstage, or inside our minds?

The work is inspired by guided body scans, common in contemporary dance training, where attention is directed towards different limbs and organs to aid meditation and movement exploration. The instructions, however, gradually become faster and more sexual than those you’d find in your average improvisation class. Suggestive deep breaths punctuate phrases including ‘come into my mouth’, ‘pound me down’, and ‘come on, take it’, transforming the work from a methodical set of directions



into an invigorating wake-up call, enticing us – as the title suggests – to enliven our ‘dead’ bodies after the disembodiment of lockdown.

Driscoll’s practice has always been centred around participatory modes of performance, but Guided Choreography for the Living and Dead feels particularly relevant to the coronavirus crisis: audiences are able to socially distance, or even take part via YouTube. It’s a novel experience, and it is interesting to see choreographers work with expanded notions of what constitutes choreography. But I can’t help wondering how much this experimental spirit, and the audience’s appetite for it, will last after we’re allowed back in theatres to experience bodies in motion.

The bottom line: An interesting experimental concept for the strange times we find ourselves in – and beyond?

Created and performed by: Faye Driscoll / Digital interface: Studio-Set / Video production: Daniel Jackson / Production and management: George Lugg

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker & Radouan Mriziga: 3ird5@w9rk

Oonagh Duckworth
15 September 2020

The intersection of nature with culture – a garden – forms the setting for a site-specific duet by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Radouan Mriziga

Maison des Arts, Brussels, Belgium

3ird5@w9rk was specially made for the garden of Brussels' Maison des Arts, where we are sat around a decorative pond, its water replaced by a silver, blue and gold striped bottom. Birds are chirping and expectations are high. High up in adjacent windows of the Maison des Arts, we notice two dancers, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Radouan Mriziga; on strains of The Beatles' 'Revolution', they swoop, arms outstretched, but don't touch.

Focus shifts to Belgian rap artist Ashley Morgan, reading a text about how we respond more to the molecular geometry of the scent of a rose than to the scent itself. It's a clue to what happens next. Having descended, De Keersmaeker and Mriziga measure and sketch lines within and around the pond. These ritualised workings-out have become hallmarks in both choreographers' productions and, whether you find them poetic or pedantic, reveal their shared reverence for the innate geometry of the natural world.


© Anne Van Aerschot

Again barely touching, they begin a series of movement signatures: twists reminiscent of her first choreography, *Fase*, propel De Keersmaeker around the inner circle, while Mriziga's moves follow his own internal compass. Only when the two connect their circles, Mriziga on the outside and De Keersmaeker holding the centre, do my audience molecules begin to stir: something about entrustment and transmission seems to be occurring between them.

But there's more. Mriziga looks on as De Keersmaeker, head shrouded with a scarf, half dances, half stumbles around the pond, and among us. Muffled, she recites the lyrics of Grandmaster Flash's 1982 rap hit 'The Message'. It's an extraordinary moment, comfortable for no one: 'close to the edge', as the rapper wrote, is where the choreographers go. De Keersmaeker, risking incredible vulnerability, following Mriziga into new territory, is compelling.

It wasn't the sumptuous celebration I was craving for my first live dance experience in six months, but I decided to view *3ird5@w9rk* as a choreographic etching of what our wounded world's been about of late, because, on a molecular level, that's what I needed it to be.

The bottom line: The geometric qualities of natural surroundings reverberate in a work, abstract yet laced with urban angst

By: Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker & Radouan Mriziga / Music: Ashley Morgan, Jalil El Yazidi / Light design: Radouan Mriziga / Costumes: Lila John / Coordination: Tessa Hall / Technicians: Gaspar Schelck, Angela Massoni / Production: Rosas, A7LA5 / Coproduction: Kunstenfestivaldesarts, Belgium

Danser brut
Outsider dance

Oonagh Duckworth
27 October 2020

A wide ranging exhibition across two museums in Belgium affords fascinating visions of 'outsider dance'

Movement as both a symptom of madness and its remedy; art and dance's potential to heal social ills as well as to mask them – Danser Brut is a multiplication, a mixture, a *mise-en-abîme* of these poignant paradoxes. Presented jointly by Bozar in Brussels and the Dr Guislain Museum in Ghent, Danser Brut (September 2020 – January 2021) is a fascinating exhibition that sheds light on the connection between dance and involuntary and repetitive movements – a theme that, because Covid-19 is still making us dance the two steps forward, one step back jig*, seems to hold particular appeal right now.

Danser Brut assembles a wide-ranging mix of films, photographs, collage, drawings and paintings together with carefully curated hospital documents and archive material. The works have been selected not for the 'genius or the madness of the artist', but because they are 'movement in the purest form'. From big names to anonymous, 'outsider' (*brut*) artists, the works on display have largely been inspired by the physical paroxysms associated with altered mental states or insanity. The work created not only resonates with the viewer, but in many instances seems to provide relief from the artist's own anguish, which is at the essence of much of *art brut*.

Both host venues lead us thorough the same five themes – Spinning Around, Trance and Possession, Charcot to Chaplin, Forest of Gestures and Dance of the Pencil – with several oeuvres doubled up in both cities. The backdrop of the Dr Guislain Museum, housed in the original 1857 brick built psychiatric asylum, certainly emphasises the correlation between madness and movement. The elegant Art Nouveau, Victor Horta, Bozar building however, delivers more momentum to the visit. Again, the constraints of Covid-19 mean we are swept through the five rooms on a long, one-directional curve. Angles in several spaces have been rounded off by hip-height walls, accentuating the idea that we are surfing a wave as we walk.

Background: Dwight Mackintosh, *Single Male Figure* (detail), 1994, ink on paper. De Stadshof Collection Foundation. Museum Dr Guislain, Ghent. Photo: Mirjam Devriendt

Right: Valeska Gert, *Tänzerische Pantomimen*, 1925, film stills. © Centre national de la danse CN D

Be: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Jane Avril, 1893 © KBR, Prints Department, Brussels



* The phrase 'two steps forward, one step back' comes from the quaint Dancing Procession of Echternach, held yearly in the oldest town in Luxembourg that grew up around the Abbey founded in 698. The procession's origins are obscure, but it's listed by UNESCO as representative of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Movement is both a symptom of madness and its remedy

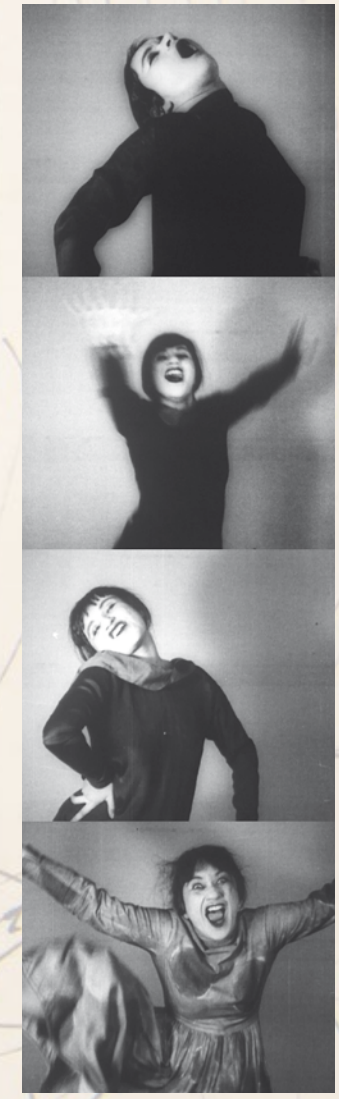
The first moving image we meet is a film of Valeska Gert, fluttering on a free-floating screen in the middle of the space. The Berlin performer, who came to prominence between 1914 and 1928, would station herself in front of blank cinema screens while the film reels were being changed. At times she would remain static, challenging the startled public to project their own imagination, anxieties and desires onto her immobility. At others she would dance 'death' or 'the orgasm' or 'a road accident' with convulsive and unrestrained movements whose intensity lent them alarming veracity.

The exhibit still startles today, not just because of its power but because, although dated 1925, we instantly recognise Gert's persisting legacy: the facial mannerisms of Pina Bausch's dancers immediately spring to mind, as do the consciously impudent hip swings and shoulder shrugs of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker's first works. Gert was considered a precursor of punk for good reason.

Then there comes the carousel section: Spinning Around. Here multiple merry-go-rounds installed on a rotating plinth catch the light and cast shadows. They are the work of 'outside artist' René Guisset, a French farm worker, born in 1935, who, despite poor health, was able to fashion strangely characterful circus carousels out of vegetable crates, old paint pots and nails. On the walls nearby are the equally obsessive, meticulously felt-pen-coloured works of Helmut Nimczewski, a Polish outside artist born in 1945, whose densely detailed drawings are so brimming with sunshine and light, ferris-wheels and jauntiness, that they are, literally, dazzling.

Trance and Possession is much more sombre, and reveals details about the fascinating yet unfathomable mediaeval 'dance epidemics'. The first of several, dating back to the fourteenth century, spread throughout Europe from the Lower Rhine, through Flanders and into France. Rare drawings, in the style of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, portray an annual pilgrimage that took place throughout the sixteenth century in Molenbeek – a Brussels commune, recently in the public eye for being a terrorist hideout – to commemorate a 'dancing plague' where some people danced themselves to death. There was speculation at that time whether the dancing was heresy or illness. The epidemics often emerged at times of social unrest, when authority was being questioned or even challenged. Their potential power for inciting insurrection was fully recognised and therefore they were not prohibited but rather the dancing 'victims' denigrated as 'loose women' and 'ignorant men'.

The section continues to delve into the links between dance, mental illness and death with examples of fifteenth-century woodcuts of skeletons gleefully dancing *La Danse Macabre*, and more recent





works such as Serbian Goran Djurović's *ZE-RE-MO-NIE*, showing a skull-headed figure mercilessly manipulating human marionettes. But what dominates the room once again is a suspended screen showing an extract of *Paracelsus* (1943) by revered Austrian film director Georg Wilhelm Pabst. Active during the Weimar Republic, Pabst unwillingly made some work, including Paracelsus, under the auspices of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. A lot of Nazi-era cinema has been re-evaluated in recent decades as being subtly subversive against the Reich; *Paracelsus* is one example, with its emphasis on love as a healing force. The scene shown here is *The Dance of Death*, choreographed and performed by Mary Wigman's pupil Harald Kreutzberg, who incarnates the Black Death entering into quarantined Basel, and 'contaminating' its people. Not only do we feel we are looking down an expressionist kaleidoscope at a dislocated version of our current situation, but we definitely espy bits of Nijinsky's *Rite of Spring*, flavours of Jerome Robbins' *West Side Story*, and, most patently, nearly all of the choreography of Michael Jackson's famed video, *Thriller*.

> **Borrowing movements from 'madness' for artistic ends**

Choreographers such as Meg Stuart and Alain Platel understood from the start that shuddering, contortions, twitching and compulsive repetitive gestures on stage convey psychological angst more directly than any words. But the borrowing of movements from 'madness' for artistic ends, in the western world of cinema, predates these choreographers by over a century. Hysteria and syndromes like Tourette's were being researched and documented in Paris' Salpêtrière hospital, with images made available to a wider public for the first time.

According to this section of the exhibition, Charcot to Charlie, the tics and spasms of patients were imitated by the likes of Charlie Chaplin who made them a hallmark of his comic genius. And the slapstick farce, *Le Frotteur* (1907) by Alice Guy, the first ever female film director and probably the only one at that time, is prodigious in the way it uses this marginalised movement simultaneously for comic effect and social comment: Le Frotteur is a cleaner who, literally, brings down a bourgeois household.

Another even earlier case of the entwinement of altered states of mind, art and dance is illustrated by the rise to fame of Moulin Rouge dancer Jane Avril, herself a patient of Jean-Martin Charcot, immortalised in an 1893 poster by Toulouse-Lautrec. Her famous and adored can-can dancing was said to have been a consequence of sporadic fits of epilepsy.



Above: Vaslav Nijinski, *Arcs and Segments: Lines*, 1918–1919, © Stiftung John Neumeier – Dance Collection / Succession Nijinski

Left: Joachim Koester, *Tarantism*, 2007. © Courtesy of Joachim Koester and Jan Mot, Brussels

Right: Hendrick Hondius I (after Pieter Bruegel de Oude), *Pilgrimage of the Epileptics to the Bridge at Molenbeeck*, 1642 © Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

But the exhibition is much more than a juxtaposition of illness and art. Seek out the gyroscopic circles traced by Nijinsky when he was obliged to stop his career as a dancer. Or the wall of drawings by 13-year-old autistic artist Lucile Notin-Bourdeau, who, unable to speak, expresses her inner world thorough pencilled, diaphanous figures, all of whom avoid our gaze. And then Louise Bourgeois' beautiful and terrifying *Triptych for the Red Room*, where two bodies, one female, one male, are strained and stretched, arching back into a pose so often associated with hysteria.

My special prize though goes to John Elsas, a German banker and stockbroker who, beginning at the age of 75, in 1926, made a 25,000-page illustrated oeuvre for his grandchildren with delightful, hopping, skipping and spinning characters, each offering a nugget of advice on the world, on philosophy and how to deal with the rise of national socialism.

The exhibition ends with *Tarantism*, a 2007 film installation by Danish artist Joachim Koester based on the idea of the medieval, manic dance, the tarantella, thought to cure victims of the tarantula spider's venomous bite. It films a group of contemporary dancers in the throes of a modern-day tarantella. The improvising of convulsive movements is a staple part of a dancer's training today, so it seems an appropriate piece to close the exhibition's curve.

But wait, there is one more I hadn't noticed: a work by Philippe Vandenberg, a Belgian artist who committed suicide



in 2009. KILL THEM ALL AND DANCE it shouts furiously in large, sprawled letters.

In Belgium, as elsewhere, the arts are suffering. Artists are angry at having to justify their relevance during the Covid crisis. More than ever before, art institutions are conscientiously bringing into focus the important role art plays in our lives and in society. Danser Brut is part of the launch of Bozar's new season themed 'Art and Wellbeing'. The exhibition's introduction also asks: 'What does all that unbridled movement say about our state of wellbeing?' I'm not sure yet, but at least it shows we are still alive. Being able to see this particular exhibition, for me, was definitely therapeutic. •

Dancing virtually into the London Film Festival

Ka Bradley
27 October 2020

The new LFF Expanded programme dances towards virtual and augmented realities

BFI Southbank, London, UK

To begin with an acknowledgment of how everything has changed and the world of theatre faces unprecedented challenges seems, seven months in to our paradigm-shifting plague, so obvious it feels almost like the sort of clichéd opener an editor would remove. [Something less commonplace?], a marginal note might read.

It's fortunately possible to think of the BFI London Film Festival's new virtual and augmented reality strand, LFF Expanded, as innovative engagement with the medium of film in and of its own right, rather than only a way of adjusting to this terrible new reality where theatres close and audiences shrink and jobs are cut. Though it might be difficult to look at film and performance with optimism right now, LFF Expanded's programme assures us that boundaries are still being tested, play and curiosity and experimentation are still supported in a time of uncertainty. That virtual reality and film can also be beamed directly into the living rooms, bedrooms and home offices of audiences is relevant and cheering: we continue to be an audience, together apart.

We are at the very start of the age of virtual and augmented reality: the technology exists, but sometimes at glitching, counter-intuitive or superfluous levels. (In ten years, we might look at the helmet-like headsets the way we now look at 1980s brick-thick carphones.) When VR works, viewers come away with a real sense of having



Harry Alexander in *Dazzle* by Ruth Gibson and Bruno Martelli
Photo © Oliver Wroble



witnessed the crystallisation of a new art form. When it doesn't, it can feel baffling or frustrating, making grouchy Luddites out of the most tech-savvy.

Fortunately, the Expanded strand has some inspiring examples of how new technology might work in service of dance and performance. This was striking in the 360° film *Gimme One*. A 360° film differs from VR and AR in that it does not promise an augmented layer on top of our reality, nor does it plunge us into a box-fresh coded reality outside of our own. It is, simply, a film that you sit within, rather than one which you face on a screen – a basic benchmark for 'immersive' theatre.

Gimme One is a documentary film about British ballroom culture – focusing on London and Bristol – and in some respects has some conventional documentary frameworks. Talking heads (members of the ballroom community) describe their personal experience of vogueing, of the 'houses' they belong to, of the ways the ballroom community has encouraged them to explore and accept their gender identities and sexualities. Their first-person descriptions are interspersed with filmed fragments from vogue balls, and with stylised, computer-rendered neon silhouettes of vogueing dancers against depthless VR black. As with the Expanded thread's other 360° films, at-home audiences can experience *Gimme One* at home on YouTube.

The VR format, however, does something that feels special. Those talking heads appear as real people sitting in front of us, making eye contact, laughing in conversation and – though our part of the script is silent – this makes their private revelations feel much more intimate. This film was put together with the engaged collaboration of its performers (contrast *Paris is Burning*, considered by many in the ballroom community to have exploited members of New York's ballroom scene for the eventual acclaim and profit of its director); our ability to face and greet these performers emphasises this personal connection. Teleported into a nightclub, we sit in the midst of the audience to watch the dancers walk (as vogueing across a strip of dance floor is known); it's impossible to contain a surge of tenderness and nostalgia for crowds we've sat in, nightclubs we've drunk at, people we're been crammed with, shoulder to shoulder. Hip-deep in revellers – the floor levels can take a bit of adjustment – I thought about my friends who have been felled by post-viral chronic exhaustion, who suffer from anxiety in crowded spaces, who live far away from centres of queer culture but long to be immersed in it. This technology is in its infancy, and cannot replicate interaction, but its initial forays into recording the buzz of the world feel optimistic. Even the computer-rendered silhouettes, with their colour schemes that felt humorously retro, recalling the computer generated world of 1992's sci-fi horror action film *The Lawnmower Man*, were a wink at the possibilities.

The standard, non-VR/360° documentary film format has developed its own language, techniques and expectations. A thought-provoking comparison could be drawn with *Si c'était de l'amour (If It Were Love)*, Patrick Chiha's documentary about the



Above: Harry Silverlock's *Gimme One* teleports the viewer into British ballroom culture

Right: Patrick Chiha's documentary *Si c'était de l'amour*, about performing in Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*

Far right: *Dazzle: Solo*, a VR experience by Bruno Martelli and Ruth Gibson

Photos courtesy of BFI London Film Festival

touring performers of Gisèle Vienne's *Crowd*, a dance piece inspired by the 1990s rave scene. *Si c'était de l'amour* is feature-length (*Gimme One* is about fifteen minutes long), and intersperses filmed segments of *Crowd* with interviews with the dancers, and segments from the rehearsal, at which Vienne directs in French and English, with touch, with demonstration and with her voice.

Crowd is a thrilling work and part of the pleasure of this film is watching the cake being made, as it were – listening to Vienne describe what she wants, how it should be achieved, then seeing the dancers realise the emotions, the storylines of their 'characters', in such legible and visible ways. There's pleasure in seeing exemplary performance too, of course – at one point, the performers moved from wilting stillness to jerking, ecstatic movement with such suddenness that I thought it was a camera trick, and not (as it was) absolute control of breath and limb, to evoke the judder of a beat and the high point of an upper hitting. Chiha's exquisite construction means that 'documentary' segments – where the dancers talk, confess, describe – feel as if they too are following the trajectory of a night out at a rave: the initial, muted but excited opener; then chattiness, the intense energy of the rave in motion; the late-night smoking area confessions, the raw conversations; then the blue light of dawn, sleep pulling, exhaustion calling. All these energies are summoned by simple conversations on camera, using some clever lighting and careful editing.

The very use of such editing and direction emphasises *Si c'était de l'amour*'s existence as a film – not just a filmed version of a separate work of art; it is to be enjoyed as a film, as one might watch, for example, Gaspard Noé's *Climax*. It does not attempt to immerse its viewer or bring them in to the experience of the dance; it puts the viewer on the outside, to admire a polished gem. Evidently, 360° film and conventional film can aim for two completely different experiences without taking away from one another.

What about truly virtual realities? In the interactive work *Dazzle: Solo*, Alexa Pollmann, Bine Roth, Bruno Martelli and choreographer Ruth Gibson reimagine the Chelsea Art Club's 1919 Great Dazzle Ball. The geometric shapes on camouflage ships

> How might dance develop under peculiar new gravities?





inspired the original ball; camouflage was known as 'dazzle painting'. In *Dazzle: Solo*, the solo viewer 'enters' a 'room' and is surrounded by shifting platforms and giant floating cubes, all in black and white. It's dazzling; it's disorientating. Unlike *Gimme One*, *Dazzle: Solo* is intended to drop the viewer into a contained, alternate reality, obeying its own strange and intriguing physics. How might dance develop under peculiar new gravities?

Audience members can use their handheld joysticks to navigate from 'room' to 'room'. It's like entering a chessboard that has come alive and had an identity crisis. In one 'room', we are in the tunnels of a strange city, the grating above us filled with dancers ticking and tocking and turning in beautiful spirals. In another, we are inside a black-and-white soft-play tech nightmare, where the walls bulge and bubble, and peculiar, quasi-humanoid shapes stretch and bounce in and out of canniness. The overall ambience is utterly futuristic, and because of that vaguely exciting, but Gibson's choreography, which feels mathematically curious and exact when it is most visible on the obviously human figures, is sometimes lost in the overpowering visuals.

One thing the Expanded strand also impressed on me was the necessity of front of house staff in the world of performance arts. Navigation from 'room' to 'room' in *Dazzle: Solo* baffled me until I was helped, and indeed calibrating my headset was impossible without assistance. The front of house were our guides to this new world, there to ensure we entered safely, donned our cleaned, virus-free headsets, and to guide us out. Our VR flights of imagination would have been much less fulfilling without the foundations laid in the real world. Moreover, the Oculus Rift S headset retails at £399, the cheapest HTC Vive at £549, substantially more than the price of a cinema ticket, even to a premiere at Leicester Square. Though LFF Expanded is free, most people will not be able to view the VR segments at home.

The experience of a VR performance can feel like a private viewing, an extraordinary gift. In *All Kinds of Limbo*, for example, we feel privileged to be the sole audience at Nubiya Brandon's gig, as she performs original music by Raffy Bushman and the NuShape Orchestra. Commissioned by the National Theatre to respond to their production of Andrea Levy's *A Small Island*,

All Kinds of Limbo reflects the influence of Caribbean culture on the UK's music scene. Brandon raps against the backdrop of a distant city, lit by the streetlamp in a lonely street, to a grime track; she twinkles at us and in a gorgeous 1930s evening dress, on the stage of an Art Deco club, stirring her hips through a calypso ballad. It feels as if this charisma, this wonder, these sweeping filmic landscapes, have been designed especially for us – which is, of course, the potency and potential of such works. This is heightened by the necessity of Covid-19 restrictions; pre-pandemic viewings of *All Kinds of Limbo* were shown to twenty people at a time, who were able to move about in the virtual space together.

But this sense of intimacy with art is impossible without a broader connection with art at the level of community – 'reggae' and 'A Small Island' and 'theatre' are equally meaningless if all we want is bright colours and beautiful people beamed straight under our eyelids. If we don't safeguard our performance spaces – the staff who run them, the companies that perform in them – we give up the fundaments of what art is supposed to give us: a shared imaginative space where we can find a common emotional language to communicate. Both *Dazzle: Solo* and *All Kinds of Limbo* were intended for small, not solo, audiences; their futuristic vision always included participation and collectivity.



This strikes afresh when considering the augmented reality piece *Acqua Alta – Crossing the Mirror*, and another conventional, non-VR film: David Byrne's live performance of his album *American Utopia*, directed by Spike Lee. *Acqua Alta* is an interactive installation – in ten scenes, a story about a man, a woman, a house and a devastating flash flood unfold and undulate across the pages of a giant book. These monochrome scenes, beautifully drawn and animated by artists Adrien M & Claire B, are visible through the screen of an iPad. The movement is based on performances by dancers Dimitri Hatton and Satchie Noro, and is deliciously calligraphic – Hatton and Noro flow and stumble across the page, their bodies sometimes fluid sentences, and sometimes bent back or struggling against rising water, as if the abrupt punctuation of the external has broken the speech of their bodies.

Its magic is the very magic that AR often fails to live up to, in these early stages of its form – it suggests a secret new dimension to the everyday, in this case the paper sculptures popping out of the book. The pleasure we take from it is knowing our experience of the space around us, of our bodies and the bodies we interact with, has been touched by the fantastical. We couldn't achieve it without the solidity of place where the fantastic can occur, where we can dip into unreality.

> **Our experience of our bodies, and the bodies we interact with, has been touched by the fantastical**



Above: *Acqua Alta*, an augmented reality storybook by Adrien M and Claire B. Photo © Adrien M & Claire B

Left: David Byrne in *American Utopia*, directed by Spike Lee. Photo © BFI London Film Festival

American Utopia is a wonderful filmed artefact of a joyous performance. David Byrne, of Talking Heads fame, ambles and skips with his barefoot band across a simple grey box of a stage. Everyone is dressed in a loose, comfortable-yet-formal grey suit, and the big smiles, precise but satisfyingly unembellished choreography, and the generous upbeat tempo of the album American Utopia (alongside some more classic Talking Heads songs) gives the whole film a charming *The Good Place* vibe. The two dancers of the grey-suit cast are members of choreographer Annie-B Parson's Big Dance Theater; their cheering bounces and crisp, semaphore-like arm movements merge seamlessly with the overall buzz of a brisk, bustling, optimistic neighbourhood jam. It's such a charismatic film, so seamlessly recorded, so immediate and tight in its direction, that it straddles I'm glad I'm here and I wish I could have been there. The film is wonderful for everyone who couldn't be – but the live experience of theatre will always be a bright, high point. •



Adrien M & Claire B: Faire corps

Oonagh Duckworth
12 November 2020

A rapturous fusion of sensation with motion, imagination and engineering, and body with light

Gaîté Lyrique, Paris, France

Photo © Vinciane Lebrun

Conception, artistic direction, scenography: Claire Bardainne et Adrien Mondot / General direction: Jean-Marc Lanoë / Exhibition montage: Loïs Drouglazet, Rémi Engel, Mélina Faka, Claire Gringore, Jean-Marc Lanoë, Yannick Moréteau, Elvire Tapie, Antoine Villeret / Technical direction: Alexis Bergeron / Administration : Marek Vuiton / Production : Margaux Fritsch, Joanna Rieussec, Delphine Teypaz

Maybe you remember those liquid mercury thermometers and, when they broke, how pleasing it was to chase the mercury balls around trying to grasp them between your fingers. Or those school experiments with iron filings and magnets: matter having a life of its own in fact. *Faire Corps*, the interactive 'artistic experience' imagined and engineered by the French company, Adrien M & Claire B, at Paris' Gaîté Lyrique theatre, holds that same fascination, while also lulling us into feeling we're part of a dreamy sci-fi fiction film on a voyage between benevolent, star-filled universes. The fact that there are other mortals, with rucksacks and plastic bags covering their shoes, sharing our experience, only slightly disrupts our suspension of disbelief.

But this is also a source of delight: grown-ups, as enthusiastic as their children, in front of futuristic fairground mirrors, where the slightest movement enables their reflection to turn elastic, rippling and twisting fantastically. Or other people, visible inside a giant transparent cube, conjuring up a flurrying storm of white letters with the waft of an arm.

And still more, queueing to choreograph a pas de deux with shards of light that cluster, spread out and disappear, just out of step with their human partner.

Adrien Mondot, multidisciplinary artist, computer scientist and juggler, together with Claire Bardainne, visual artist, graphic designer and scenographer, pooled their talents and founded their company in 2011 with the aim of creating performances and installations that 'place the body at the heart of images'. Indeed, perhaps because the technology is so seamless, our tactile connection to it feels spontaneous and natural; and the monochrome purity of the light and mirror optical illusions, together with the echoing soundscape, make the whole experience feel poetic and truly otherworldly. Faire Corps is beautiful proof of how far digital art has come from its clunky beginnings, and of how far we've come in merging with it, both in body and mind. The future is already here.

The bottom line: A close-up, physical encounter with the digital poetics of tomorrow

Teresa Vittucci, Michael Turinsky, Claire Vivianne Sobottke: We Bodies

Evgeny Borisenko
10 December 2020

We Bodies is an hour-long performative question on monsterhood, exorcism, domination, docility – and more

Sophiensaele, Berlin, Germany

Choreography and performance: Claire Vivianne Sobottke, Teresa Vittucci, Michael Turinsky / Sound: Tian Rotteveel / Dramaturgical advice: Sheena McGrandles / Stage: Anna Wohlgemuth, Lilli Unger / Technical direction and light: Lukas Sander / Production manager: groundworkers/Kira Koplin

Co-production: OH DEAR and the Association for Philosophical Practice, with Tanzhaus Zürich, Kaserne Basel, Arsenic Lausanne / In co-operation with: Wildwuchs Festival and WUK Performing Arts, Vienna / Supported by: Pro Helvetia, Stadt Zürich Kultur, Department of Culture Canton Zurich, City of Vienna, Migros Culture Percentage.

'Do you have any questions?' sarcastically asked Teresa Vittucci at the end of *We Bodies*, which she had choreographed and performed with Claire Vivianne Sobottke and Michael Turinsky. Yes I did, both before and after. Knowing this would be my last live performance before another German-wide lockdown, I longed for challenges. Indeed, *We Bodies* feels like an hour-long question. Devised as an exploration of monsterhood, it is in fact open to hundreds of other interpretations and, yes, questions.

The show opens with the trio ebbing and flowing through a slow sequence of hand gestures, glares and enthralling dance patterns on pastel-lit circular white stage. The rhythm intensifies, they don plush costumes and leap gleefully to Tian Rotteveel's upbeat on-stage soundscore. Quirky wrestling holds and flirtatious locks ensue, bodies plummet onto the stage and each other. Again the pace slows towards a spooky close where tears, sweat and saliva flow, yelling is mimicked, and hands explore armpits, flabs and crotches. One closing kick: quiet mumbles and sighs vocoder-transformed until a faltering 'Please, release me!' becomes an unearthly exorcist prayer. This eerie ending comes slightly out of the blue, leaving yet more uncertainties: who are the prisoners and the guards, is release imminent?

Vittucci, Sobottke and Turinsky navigate contrasts: undulatory tableaux and racing joyful scenes, violent locks and hearty


Photo © Mayra Wallraff

giggling, mysterious soundscapes and groovy beats. Naked or clad, they intertwine in lecherous poses only to explode in fast frolics. Each episode and movement is beautifully carved into the show structure, but pile more questions onto the interpretations of monsterhood put forward in the performance booklet. What dynamics underlie the agencies and motions of these 'monsters'? What about the political backdrop? Where does it lead us?

Despite some haywire transitions and a few overlong episodes, the uncanny back-and-forth between adulthood and childishness, care and brutality, domination and docility is as captivating as it is evasive. Challenging the binaries on which so many shows heedlessly prosper, We Bodies celebrates corporality in all its bluntness, frailty and vigour.

The bottom line: Questions of bodies produce bodies of questions

Wanjiru Kamuyu: An Immigrant's Story Smaïl Kanouté: Never Twenty One

Charles A. Catherine
22 December 2020

Edgy performances at the edge of Paris that take us beyond our own horizons

L'Espace 1789, Saint-Ouen, France

'I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.' In a globalised world, there are two ways to practise Socrates' idea of the sense of belonging: encountering many communities, or combining them In a double programme for a Covid-compatible restricted audience, L'Espace 1789, theatre of Saint-Ouen, a struggling suburb of Paris, has – unusually for French stages – successfully united these approaches.

First, Wanjiru Kamuyu presented *An Immigrant's Story*, a colourful dance-and-text solo, true call for tolerance and fraternity based on the common discourses and attitudes she met while resident in Nairobi, New York and Paris, about migration, feeling home, racism, domination, difference or coexistence. Then Smaïl Kanouté presented *Never Twenty One*, a shadow-and-light male dance trio, true call for peace and responsibility through the denunciation of gun violence and its young victims in New York, Rio de Janeiro and Soweto. Both use recorded stories, narrative costumes, mixed dance, sophisticated lights. Here ends the comparison.



Left: Wanjiru Kamuyu, *An Immigrant's Story*

Right: Smaïl Kanouté, *Never Twenty One*

Kamuyu develops a very sensitive approach, alternating text bearing the political meaning spoken face to face with the audience, and inspired dance bearing the poetical load, going gradually from the feet in the ground to the head in the air. The autobiographical traces dissolve in the half-laughable, half-despicable wider experience of difference and racism that she presents in all its crudity. Alone on a stage bordered with a row of upside down chairs, she escapes from the ugliness of situations by always looking at the bright side, reinventing herself through movement, music, stories and clothes. Tearing her colourful wax doublet, she reveals a long sleeveless split coat she later turns inside out, before covering her hair with her shirt. More than a patchwork identity, Wanjiru Kamuyu embodies fusions of cultures through metamorphosis, ending in a joyful ritual dance that carries the promise of better days to come.

Kanouté made a very contrasting journey. From his short experiences in the Bronx or in Rio, he found creative youths all dealing with wrath and hope, real and symbolic violence, finding freedom in music and dance. *Never Twenty One* begins with a short movie showing the slums of New York, like a peaceful morning after a night of battle. Though Kanouté never brings the weapons to light, their menacing shadow covers the stage so that, the three dancers appear and disappear like powerful ghosts, as do the white inscriptions, in English and Portuguese, borne by the black skin of their chests. The energy never stops, Kanouté and his two dancers deliver a fluid and dazzling hip-hop mixed with African dance, war postures, capoeira, sweat being the only redemptive water they seem to want. Slowly, he drives us to remember the lost ones by looking at the dark yet beautiful consequences of violence on young and innocent bodies, never forgetting in his complaint that 'Smaïl' sounds like 'smile'.


© Mark Marlborough

Echoing in our minds the #BlackLivesMatter struggle, both shows broaden our horizons. Their strong and neat impact comes out of the clarity they were made with. The precision of construction, the richness of their staging, the truth of their messages and, in a way, the tragedy they choose to talk about: everything contributed to make the audience feel part of the story, and not only as a monster. Dance absolutely took its place as narrator of heritage, and of the present.

The bottom line: two stories cross the global and the local to broaden our own horizons

An Immigrant's Story
Choreographer & performer: Wanjiru Kamuyu / Dramaturge & producer: Dirk Korell / Writer: Laetitia Ajanohun / Original music composition: LACRYMOBOY / Costume: Birgit Neppl / Lighting: Cyril Mulon / Executive production: camin aktion / Co-production: Espace 1789 de Saint-Ouen, scène conventionnée de Saint- Ouen, La Manufacture CDCN Nouvelle-Aquitaine Bordeaux • La Rochelle, L'échangeur – CDCN Hauts-de-France, Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Théâtre de la Ville – Paris

Never Twenty-One
Choreography: Smail Kanouté / Performers: Aston Bonaparte, Jérôme Fidelin aka Goku, Smail Kanouté / Outside eye: Moustapha Ziane / Sound and light design: Paul Lajus / Set design: Olivier Brichet / Body painting: Lorella Disez / Costume design: Rachel Boa, Ornella Maris / Production: Company Vivons ! / Co-production: Les Ateliers Médicis – Clichy sous Bois, Espace 1789 – Saint-Ouen, CENTQUATRE – PARIS, Les Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine Saint Denis, Théâtre de la Ville – Danse Élargie 2020

Ultima Vez: Hands do not touch your precious Me

Lena Megyeri
25 January 2021

Venturing into mythic worlds – an online premiere from Wim Vandekeybus, Olivier de Sagazan and Charo Calvo

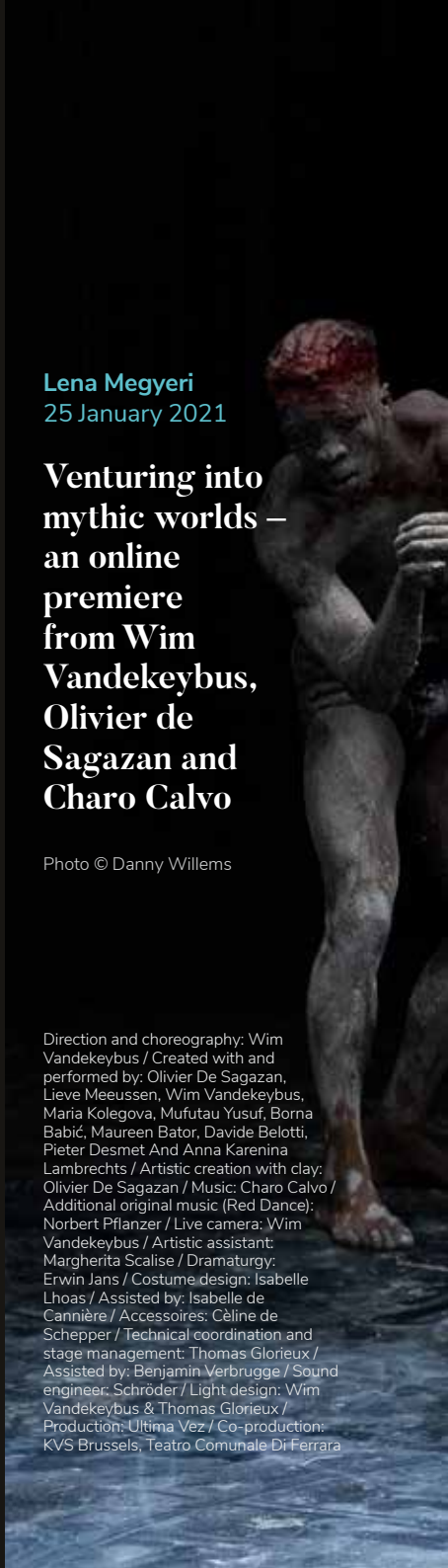


Photo © Danny Willems

Direction and choreography: Wim Vandekeybus / Created with and performed by: Olivier De Sagazan, Lieve Meeussen, Wim Vandekeybus, Maria Kolegova, Mufutau Yusuf, Borna Babić, Maureen Bator, Davide Belotti, Pieter Desmet And Anna Karenina Lambrechts / Artistic creation with clay: Olivier De Sagazan / Music: Charo Calvo / Additional original music (Red Dance): Norbert Pflanzer / Live camera: Wim Vandekeybus / Artistic assistant: Margherita Scalise / Dramaturgy: Erwin Jans / Costume design: Isabelle Lhoas / Assisted by: Isabelle de Cannière / Accessoires: Cèline de Schepper / Technical coordination and stage management: Thomas Glorieux / Assisted by: Benjamin Verbrugge / Sound engineer: Schröder / Light design: Wim Vandekeybus & Thomas Glorieux / Production: Ultima Vez / Co-production: KVS Brussels, Teatro Comunale Di Ferrara

Lately, that sense of excitement of waiting for the lights to go down in the theatre has been replaced by a different kind of excitement: connecting your laptop to your TV and getting your internet connection to work on time before the stream starts. A substitute? Yes. A valuable one? Definitely.

Not only for audiences, but for companies as well: *Hands do not touch your precious Me*, by Belgian company Ultima Vez, was cancelled twice in light of the pandemic before being premiered as a ticketed livestream from the stage of KVS in Brussels, available for 48 hours. A collaboration between choreographer Wim Vandekeybus, sculptor/performer Olivier de Sagazan and dancer-turned-composer Charo Calvo, the piece centres around stories of the Sumerian goddess Inanna (the enigmatic title, in which *Me* is the Sumerian word for 'quality', comes from a hymn dedicated to her). Inanna is a goddess of contradictions: the embodiment of both the bright and dark sides of existence. First, she steals the so-called Mes (the divine decrees on life) from the god Enki, which makes her a powerful and rich ruler. But later she descends to the underworld to meet her sister Ereshkigal, and has to renounce all her possessions before being able to be reborn.

Those two spheres of existence are represented on stage by two different artistic worlds: Vandekeybus's nine dancers, who almost fly through the stage with their jumps and rolls (the choreographer himself dances Enki with a camera in his hand, magnifying and freezing certain moments on a wall used as a screen); and de Sagazan's slowly progressing performance art that aims to transform his body by his frequently used materials of clay and paint, and includes setting his fuzzy blond wig on fire. At first these two worlds don't collide, but gradually and almost undetected, de Sagazan (who portrays Ereshkigal) captures more and more dancers like a spider captures its prey in its web. He smears them with thick layers of clay and splatters them with red and black paint, forming them into dripping, muddy creatures: somewhat inhuman, somewhat threatening. After Inanna loses the last of her lot to the underworld, she has no choice but face its ruler, her sister. Their embrace is turned into a living clay sculpture, and Inanna is brought to a new existence in a hypnotic circle dance.

Watching a stage performance on screen is a tricky thing: the camera drags you into the middle of the action, and yet you always remain an outsider. You'll miss out on things, you will never get the whole picture, and most importantly, you will not be able to feel the energies, risks and vibes that make theatre what it really is. In exchange, you get details that you wouldn't see if you were sitting in an auditorium. Perhaps this is why I found most of the beauty in the details while watching this stream: in Lieve Meeussen's portrayal of Inanna – a wise, brisk woman who faces life's



ups and downs with the same resilience; in Anna Karenina Lambrechts' sensual and feminine warrior moves; in Maureen Bator's breathtaking transformation from anxious human being with shaky hands and frightened eyes to a wild and weird clay-covered entity.

I could go on, but the point is: while the sight of the familiar acrobatic, gravity-defying Vandekeybus crowd is also pleasing, it is the individual performances that can keep us on the edge of our sofa. It's hard though, in these viewing conditions, to judge the complexity and depth of the piece as a whole – that's to be checked live in a theatre, once the time is right.

The bottom line: Mythic realms of flesh and clay collide and merge – and so do the worlds of stage and screen

Hamid Ben Mahi: Chronic(s) 2

Charles A. Catherine
16 February 2021

Revisiting a work twenty years on, hip hop dance artist Hamid Ben Mahi finds that the fundamental things still apply, as time goes by

Théâtre d'Angoulême, France



Time goes by for everyone, even dancers. Hip hop seems forever young, but it appeared in the eighties, and its early choreographers are now in their late forties. Time to tell their stories?

All through his career, French choreographer Hamid Ben Mahi has conversed with the audience to question the identity of the dancer, often through his own experience. In 2001 – a world away, it seems now – he created *Chronic(s)* with the dramaturge Michel Schweitzer, an hour long, half-spoken half-danced solo about his beginnings: parents, learning dance, society and its biases about street culture. In 2021, *Chronic(s) 2* returns with the same structure, the same will to offer the authenticity of Ben Mahi's gaze on his work and society, this time reflecting on his experience, his sons, teaching dance. Looking to the future in 2001, to the past in 2021? It's not that simple.

In both works, the stage is a laboratory for memory: a screen where private and historical pictures come from a suspended film projector, a remote control, a microphone stand, a square of light. Ben Mahi talks with humour and gravity of what he's done and wants to do. There are common topics: expressing oneself, living dance, transmitting it, that very delicate sensibility that gives him his specificity. His dance reveals his high level classical training after being self-taught in hip hop from television: a *dégagé* exercise at the barre slips into spins on the floor, with fascinating body control. In each work, he doesn't structure a biography but draws a mental and physical landscape through which he drives us with softness and energy.

What remains, after twenty years, according to *Chronic(s) 2*? An anxiety to leave his mark on time – to which he answers by dancing for us. A few wrinkles don't hide his unchanged controlled moves, his true humility, the pleasure of his conversation on stage.

The same sentence ends *Chronic(s)* and opens *Chronic(s) 2*: 'To stay here, I have to find solutions.' This feels not so much like a problem as a joyful lifeline.

The bottom line: A sweet walk in time and space that proves hip hop too is conscious of its ephemeral nature

Direction, conception, choreography, scenography: Hamid Ben Mahi, Michel Schweizer / Performed by: Hamid Ben Mahi / Lighting design: Antoine Auger / Sound design: Nicolas Barillot, Sébastien Lamy / Photography: Pierre Wetzel, Ludovic Alussi, l'Oeil de Ken, Nicolas Moulin / Production: Compagnie Hors Série / Coproduction: La Manufacture – Centre de Développement Chorégraphique National Nouvelle-Aquitaine Bordeaux / La Rochelle/Théâtre la passerelle, scène nationale de Gap, des Alpes du Sud/La Scène Nationale Carré-Colonnes, Bordeaux Métropole

Present Futures

Róisín O'Brien
22 March 2021

Going digital in 2021 has been a natural step for a festival founded to hybridise physical and virtual realms

Image: Simon Senn in *Be Arielle F*
Photo © Mathilda Olmi

As we set up for our fourth Zoom meeting of the day, our heavy skulls weighing down a neck which evolved to look up and out, we might be catching a glimpse of our future. The Covid-19 pandemic has spotlit humankind's ever-increasing integration with technology and forced most live events to suddenly adapt to digital spaces.

But some programmers have been in this territory for a while: the Present Futures festival, for example, founded and curated by Glasgow and Berlin based artist Colette Sadler and produced by Scottish production company Feral Arts. Initiated in 2016 (then known as Fictional Matters), it grew from a desire to connect multidisciplinary artists around themes of posthumanism, science fiction, the coming together of digital and physical realms, and the hybridising of bodies and technologies. Sadler's influences run the gamut from Franz Kafka to Buckminster Fuller, but her interests are fused always with insights into the body, dance and movement.

Dance, for Sadler, is not necessarily threatened by technology (despite the sometimes-holy aura placed around it): current robotics she's seen pale in comparison to the sophistication of the dancer's trained, t*echnical* body. Furthermore, she asks, where does our identity begin and end now? Does it extend to the pen in my hand, to the phone I carry? Early editions of the festival had works that were more connected to



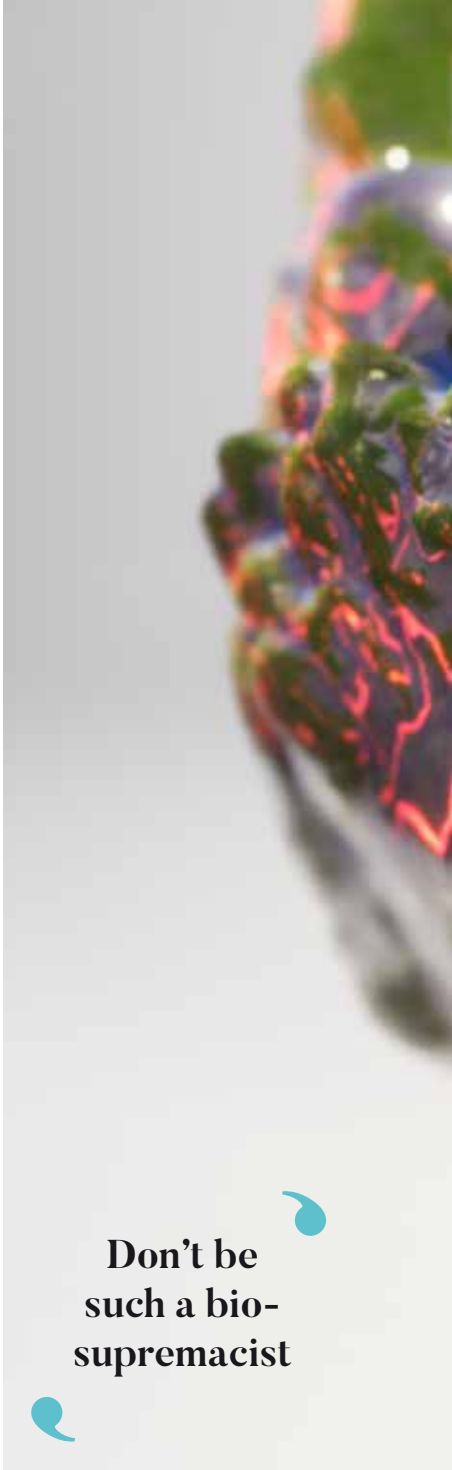
physical bodies and technologies within a real setting but now, she explains, in its second year as Present Futures, going digital is in some ways an obvious 'next level'.

Events in this year's festival included artist discussions, CGI films, audio works and recordings of live performances that I jumped in and out of over the weekend. Sadler herself leads a movement session titled *(Re)searching BODY A* for which she worked with a hypnotist. In this audio-only work, with music from Mikko Gaestel and Heiko Tubbesing, an electronically distorted voice draws participants' attention to their physical body. This body, it narrates, is new – 'you' have been transplanted into it and are to test it out in new terrains. I move through my study with eyes closed, sometimes nudging against the detritus of everyday life: the story allows me to embrace the imaginative possibility of this new body, finding a certain freedom from my muscles, bones and fleshy weight.

It's not all utopian possibility: CGI films *Feel My Metaverse* by Keiken & George Jasper Stone, and AIDOL by Lawrence Lek, look to alternate futures with a questioning eye. In *Feel My Metaverse*, characters move through verdant and psychedelic virtual worlds in different bodies, but there is an undercurrent of loss and strain. In *AIDOL*, humans ('Bios') clash with machines ('Synths') in a narrative resonant with contemporary identity politics ('don't be such a bio-supremacist'), while notions of authenticity, and what it means to be human, are explored in the relationship between a fading superstar and an AI songwriter. Dance or performance intermittently appears in both as an almost heightened attempt at expression, human or otherwise.

Artists who would perhaps otherwise have had a live performance practice are integrated into well-paced Q&As with film screenings. I manage to catch Soojin Chang and Hamshya Rajkumar's illuminating exploration of new interspecies relations and connections with nature, both artists using their own (moving) bodies to explore these relationships. Particularly fascinating is Tim Murray-Browne and Panagiotis Tigas' research project *Sonified Body*, in which an AI model is trained to analyse human motion by watching a person move. Artist, coder and researcher Murray-Browne was interested in creating an AI model that is in 'total sympathy with how the body is existing'. Tigas, an AI researcher, discusses the term 'Theory of Mind', which stipulates that when two independent agents interact, they share an assumption about the others' behaviour. How does that apply to AI, he wondered?

During their presentation, Murray-Browne and Tigas present three initial sessions conducted with dancers from different styles, whose improvisations are analysed by the AI model: the representation held by the model is then mapped into sound. The resulting audio-visual 'duets' – while not 'true' conversations in that the AI model is not learning during the improvisation – exist on an eerie plane of squiggled, beeping, almost living language, pulsing in reverberation to the dancers' movements.





> We're going to realise we're still animals, we're still bodies
>
> COLETTE SADLER

Image from *Feel My Metaverse* by Keiken & George Jasper Stone

Watching these dancers – even on screen – prompts a dormant longing that, though there for a year, hasn't gone away: to move in a physical space. Sadler believes that when people return to dance in studios 'we're going to realise we're still animals, we're still bodies... everyone now feels what it's like to be non-physical, to shuffle around the house and spend hours on the laptop. The experience of dancing together with people in a group is going to be very popular.'

As will, I think, watching dance with other people. The festival is carefully spread out over the weekend – yet I'm sure we all feel a certain energy drain, perhaps because there's no buoying feedback from physically meeting people. Even writing about the festival from my flat feels strange. I am in some ways less self-conscious or constrained by a dark, crowded theatre space, and so I can take notes more easily – but does this distract from the experience?

Internet quality can distract too. Take the audio performance *Death Drill* from **Samir Kennedy**, which asks the audience to sit in a dark room with headphones. I appreciate this curation of my experience, the extension of the performance beyond its own frame and into the world it exists in. *Death Drill* is an 'intermediate military training procedure' inviting us to imagine different ways of dying. The contrast between the blunt scenarios (beheading, drowning, burning) and the hallucinatory, musical



Sonified Body, created by Tim Murray-Browne and Panagiotis Tigas

soundscapes that follow is interestingly disorientating but a juddery internet lag on my end knocks me off kilter. You could argue it would be easy to simply 'give' people the performance – to transfer a file – but the liveness and presence of an event, compounded by the need to make money from that work, negates that possibility.

Fittingly ending this festival of uncertainties is the thoroughly enjoyable and disconcerting *Be Arielle F* from Geneva-based Simon Senn. I sit down with a cocky air: I know how Zoom works, I think, confident that I can tell if something is 'live' or not. Senn narrates his journey of acquiring a digital replica of Arielle F's female body, a body he can 'virtually' inhabit (which he demonstrates by seemingly pulling on the discrete, digital body parts). Delivered with awkwardness in a sort of demonstrative, lecturing style, there's nonetheless an uncanny value in what he delivers – is this lecture really live? He recalls travelling to the UK to meet the physical Arielle and video clips of the narrated journey and interactions appear. He diffidently asks her how she feels about others 'wearing' her digital body – the question probes uncomfortable edges but after a slight hesitation, Arielle agrees to the proposition. Truth and wishful fabrication sit side by side.

This is all enhanced rather than deflated by the Zoom format, where Senn's offbeat delivery is framed by shifting formatting and mutating interactions with the audience. By the end, the audience is entangled in complicity, the digital world neither a fully remote space nor a stable one with shared codes or etiquettes. The question of our uncertain future becomes less distant: we are already there. •

Ann Van den Broek: Creating Joy

Creating Joy is an online repurposing of a planned performance by Flemish choreographer Ann Van den Broek. Joy, joy, joy. What's in the name? On stage, master of ceremonies Gregory Frateur guides us through a clinical trial. Around him are lab-like trolleys bearing objects such as shiny shoes or a disco ball. On one, a double-sided flatscreen opens windows to recorded interviews, or to relays of dancers Louis Combeaud and Marion Bosett, at home baking bread or practising embroidery while they watch.

Frateur is dressed as a doctor, as are the two on-stage dancers, Gabriel Maury and Carla Guerra. Followed up-close by two mobile cameras, they physically translate possible answers to the main question: the cordial greetings of strangers passing at corona-proof distances, the movement of the hip in a salsa pattern. They explore these elements as if testing their percentage of joyness. It is aseptic to the point of ironic, Marie Kondo-worthy with a smile. That kind of joy.

Frateur introduces each videoclip with its 'metadata': recorded or live, film process, take number. He also discloses information about the creative process. The song A Part of Us All by Dez Mona, so we learn, is one of Van den Broek's inspirations, and we get to see solo versions of it by every musician in the band. The soothing tune and the lyrics thus become the reddest of threads:


© Rio Staelens

'these are times to cherish, things to live for'. Are they? Like the flatscreens, the whole set-up is a calmly portrayed patchwork of double-sided features. On one of the screens, Van den Broek herself reveals the point: pain and joy coexist, but here she wants to give the latter the focus it deserves.

Van den Broek is best known for her way of enriching the choreographic manipulation of space and time through videographic means. So it is no surprise that *Creating Joy*, work-in-progress or not, feels more like a polished walk in the park of online streaming than a first step into uncharted terrain. The lab results look promising.

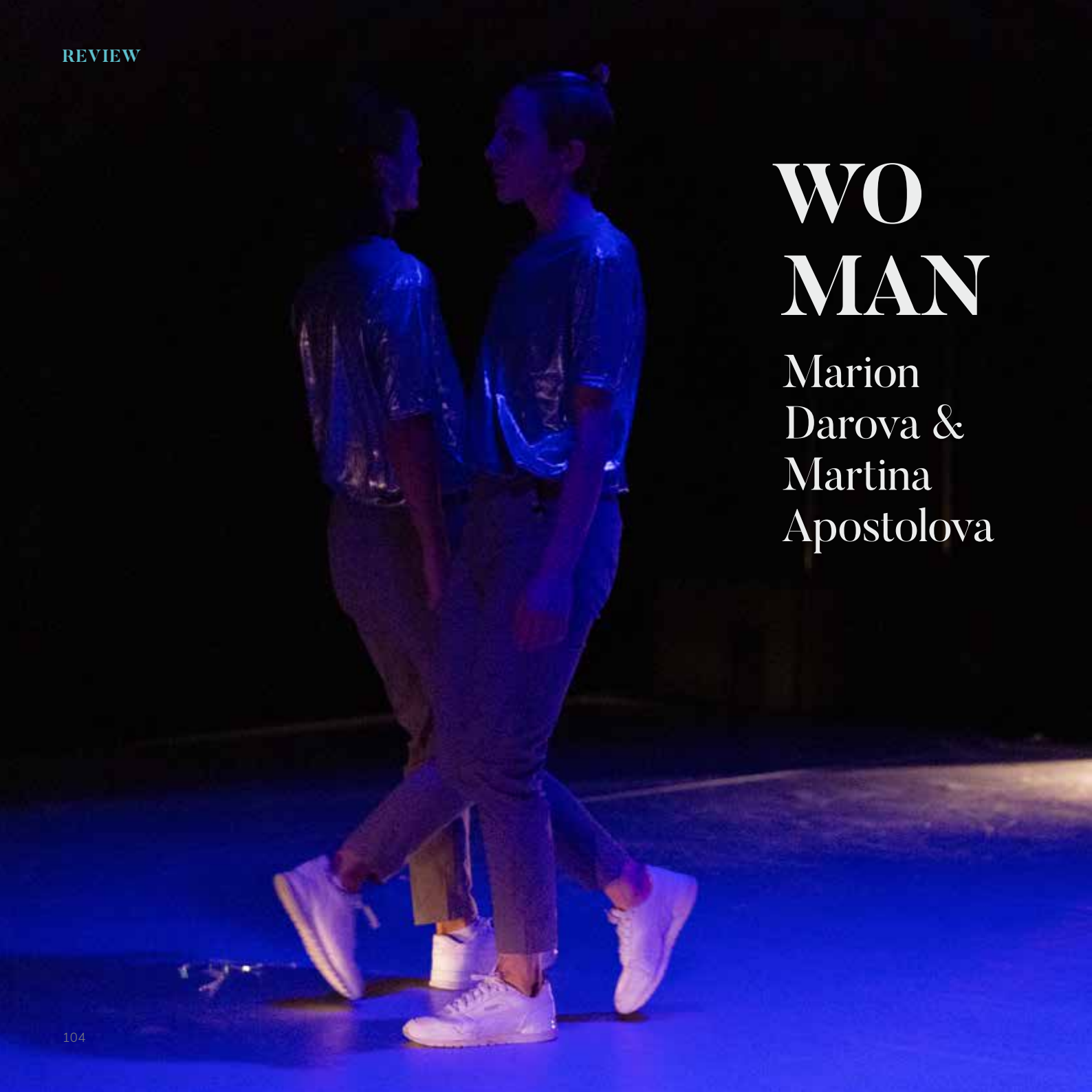
A work-in-progress, *Creating Joy* is as much the vulnerable fruit of an unfinished concept as a masterclass in media-savviness applied to performance

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen
12 April 2021

A polished kinetic, aural and videographic walk around the subject of joy with Flemish choreographer Ann Van den Broek

Online – from Theater Rotterdam, Netherlands

Concept and choreography: Ann Van den Broek / Performers (on stage and at home): Gregory Frateur, Louis Combeaud, Marion Bosetti, Jean-Gabriel Maury, Carla Guerra / Music composed and performed by: Nicolas Rombouts, Gregory Frateur / Video and light-design: Bernie van Velzen / Stage design: Niek Kortekaas / Assistant to the choreographer: Nik Rajšek / Pre-recorded guest appearances: Tijs Delbeke, Sjoerd Bruil, Nicolas Rombouts, Gregory Frateur, Frauke Mariën, Nik Rajšek, Niek Kortekaas, Jutta Troch, Pieter Theuns, Ann Van den Broek / Inspired by the song: A Part Of Us All by Dez Mona en B.O.X. / A production of WArd/waRD (NL/BE) in coproduction with partners Theater Rotterdam (NL) and ccBerchem (BE)



WO MAN

Marion Darova & Martina Apostolova



Yasen Vasilev
30 April 2021

Strict forms and unsettling imagery combine to dissolve gender identity

Sofia, Bulgaria

Photo © Orlin Ognyanov

Choreographer and dancer Marion Darova and actress and performer Martina Apostolova researched WO MAN for almost a year, sticking with it through the pandemic and premiering just before Bulgaria's second lockdown.

The first act, a screen projection, uses poetic images of the performers' androgynous bodies and faces. They play with femininity and masculinity as both inherent human aspects and as social stereotypes. They adopt attributes (strikingly yellow high heels in the black and white video), use chairs to illustrate the mismatch between identity and roles, explore the idea of the double and its uncanny attraction. The video is separated in different chapters titled 'body', 'desire', 'sex'. Two chapters – 'identity' and 'gender' – are both left blank, maybe implying that these are pure constructs that dance can help dissolve in movement?

That is what the second part sets out to do. Wearing shiny tops, grey pants, with blank faces dimly lit under a purple filter, they enter the stage in slow motion and white sneakers. Infectious bouncing, inspired by house dance, suddenly takes over their bodies. From then on they are focused on footwork, floor patterns and precise synchronisation that must have been rehearsed rigorously to become second nature. Slight variations twist and rearrange the patterns under rhythmic musical composition. They call this process *meditation*, and it really does produce a hypnotic effect, enhanced by a flat dramaturgy that refuses any climax. Freed from the task of reading meaning,



you can allow yourself to get carried away by the dance.

As our focus shifts from faces in the video to feet in the dance, androgyny is replaced by genderlessness. These pulsating bodies are neither one nor the other, they are sometimes both, sometimes neither. Twice, Darova looks completely post-gender: in a video topshot where she's in an embryonic pose, naked on the floor; and at the end of the dance, where the fading purple light makes her face nightmarishly red. In both cases, she's a creature beyond gender, unsettling and fascinating.

Bottom line: an androgynous duo reach into post-gender imagery, hypnotic composition – and rigorous footwork

Concept: Marion Darova / Performers: Martina Apostolova, Marion Darova / Sound: Alexander Evtimov / Media: Stephanie Raycheva / Photographer: Orlin Ognyanov / Supported by: National Culture Fund, DNK – space for contemporary dance and performance, DOZA gallery

Winner of the contemporary dance and performance category, 2021 IKAR National Performing Arts Award of the Union of Bulgarian Actors (UBA)

Jan Martens: any attempt will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones


© Phile Deprez

After a full year of 'pandemic postponements' and 'covid cancellations', Belgian choreographer Jan Martens finally raises the curtains on his new dance creation, *any attempt will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones*, a large-scale production featuring 17 performers aged 16 to 69. For this film adaptation of the piece, Martens teamed up with long-standing companion and Caméra d'Or laureate Lukas Dhont – and it is through his meticulous approach to documenting the dance, dissecting the order and anarchy within it, that we perceive the piece.

Like a bolt from the blue, performer Wolf Overmeire rouses the piece into motion. Repetitive music by Henryk Górecki charges the vacuous blue-grey space, making it rumble like a thundercloud. Completely surrounded by this monotonous haze, including costume in the same colour, Overmeire seems to conduct the music with his movements, rather than be conducted by it. With each alternation of the two musical themes, the work builds up gradually into a 17-headed hyperkinetic performance. Each dancer demonstrates the same wilfulness, empowerment, the desire to profile themselves in their own way. They don't speak the same body language, yet as a collective they constitute a shattering scream.

There is a strong political component, though it is neither forced nor instantaneous. For the deeper meaning, you have to dig into the work's textual aspects: a recitation of Ali Smith's *SPRING*, the lyrics of Kae Tempest's *People's Faces*, but above all the title: 'Anyone attempting to split China in any part of the country will end in crushed bodies and shattered bones,' stated President Xi in 2019.

With his stripped version, Martens makes this quote a token for the violent language that governs vulnerable societies today. Towards the end of the piece, in the eye of the storm, the insistent repetition falls still in a bird's-eye tableau: bodies scattered across the floor, some lying on top of each other almost romantically. But awkwardly folded limbs whisper chaos into this still life. It's an image of both tenderness and brutality, the peace you have in being who you are and the battle you have fought to become that person.

Bottom line: Seventeen unpretentious individuals unite in a frantic and wild manifestation

Jonas Schildermans
4 May 2021

A stripped down but hyperkinetic composition invokes a collective will

Streamed from deSingel, Antwerp, Belgium, 24 April 2021

Choreography: Jan Martens / Dance: Ty Boomershine, Truus Bronkhorst, Jim Buskens, Baptiste Cazaux, Zoë Chungong, Piet Defrancq, Naomi Gibson, Kimmy Ligtvoet, Cherish Menzo, Steven Michel, Gesine Moog, Dan Mussett, Wolf Overmeire, Tim Persent, Courtney May Robertson, Laura Vanborm and Loeka Willems / Artistic assistance: Anne-Lise Brevers / Lighting design: Jan Fedinger / Lighting design assistant: Vito Walter / Costume design: Cédric Charlier / Costume design assistant: Alexandra Sebbag, Thibault Kuhn / Advice: Marc Vanrunxt, Renée Copraij, Rudi Meulemans, Siska Baeck / Text: fragment SPRING by Ali Smith / Music: Henryk Mikolaj Górecki, Kae Tempest and Dan Carey, Maxwell Roach / Production: GRIP, in collaboration with Dance On Ensemble / Coproduction: deSingel (BE), Theater Freiburg (DE), Sadler's Wells (UK), Julidans (NL), Festival d'Avignon (FR), Le Gymnase CDCN Roubaix Hauts-de-France (FR), Norrlandsoperan (SE), La Bâtie - Festival de Genève & l'ADC (CH), tanzhaus nrw (Düsseldorf, DE), Le Parvis Scène Nationale Tarbes-Pyrénéés (FR), La Danse en grande forme (FR), Perpodium (BE)

SCENE ON SCREEN



Joker

Ka Bradley
20 June 2020

A solitary dance of transformation in Todd Phillips' dark, divisive film

youtu.be/BBY4zUFxUjA

Movement is sometimes compulsive. Consider nervous pacing, or punching the air in celebration; emotion manifests in the body, propelling it up or down or across a space. Sometimes, the purpose of a dance can be to codify or ritualise that process, or even exert an element of control over it. If we can summon the shapes of joy, perhaps we can persuade our bodies that we are happy; if we call our dance a ritual of change, renewal, hope or celebration, perhaps we will step out on the other side of the dance changed, renewed, hopeful and celebratory.

In Todd Phillips's divisive 2019 film *Joker*, Joaquin Phoenix as Arthur Fleck performs an introspective, meditative dance in a public toilet. A fascinating scene in a sometimes tedious film, it occurs after



> Here I am
> I see me
> I know me
> I am ready

Fleck has murdered three businessmen who have been harassing him on the metro – his first deliberate murder.

In the original screenplay, after bursting in to the bathroom, Arthur Fleck is scripted as babbling to himself in the mirror before putting his gun to his head and pulling the trigger, only to discover there are no bullets left in it. It would have drawn irresistible comparisons to Robert De Niro's famous 'you talkin' to me?' mirror soliloquy in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, a film which critics of *Joker* consider to be a superior version of Phillips's DC derivation. Phoenix, unscripted, performed the dance after hearing Hilda Guðnadóttir's melancholy cello composition, which Phillips played on set one day during filming.

This atmospheric dance feels like a rite. Fleck takes the terrified bolting energy of his killing and exerts control over that energy with ritualised movement. The first thing the camera focuses on are his feet, edging unsurely along the floor. It's a tentative step-ball-change; sped up, performed with confidence, it might be the vaudeville showman swagger of the Joker, but at this stage, Fleck is still Fleck, and feeling his way.

We follow his hands – fingers loose, still hesitant – and his arms, in balletic curves, propel him into a hesitant backbend; again, if sped up and executed with certainty, we might see him sweep down into the ironic bow of the Clown Prince of Crime after completing a particularly heinous felony, but he's still learning the possibilities of this new movement language. (The audience are later treated to a fully fledged manifestation of this language in the far more famous staircase dance.) The angle of the camera gives us a haunting view of Phoenix's face – no jester gurn, no thunderous frown, but a slack, introspective mask, the glimmer of the eyes focused inwards.

The camera pulls back; we do not focus on individual parts of the body testing their energy, but the whole body unifying the energy. Arms and shoulders ripple, stiffly and then more fluidly. A wave is passing over Fleck, carrying him along, washing him clean or completely submerging him – it will all depend on how you interpret his transformation. As Fleck moves more creatively, with growing certainty, his fluid undulations take on a tai chi calm and curl.

As with the waves, there are multiple ways to interpret this: Fleck is trying to calm and control his fear with meditative movement; Fleck is using the movement as a way of summoning a more martial energy, bringing deliberation and strength to his upper body; Fleck is motioning a kind of cleansing ritual, shedding his old self. When it ends, he faces the mirror, arms extended fully on either side of his body: here I am. I see me. I know me. I am ready.

In the following scene, we see Fleck marching along a corridor in his building apartment, to knock on his neighbour's door. Note the square shoulders, the high head – up until this point, Phoenix has played Fleck slumped and resigned, or cringing around a cigarette, or bent under exhaustion. There is a new cast to his body. He finally has the confidence to own his body – or else, his body is no longer him at all, and someone else has taken over. •

Protein Synthesis: An Epic on the Cellular Level

Sanjoy Roy
11 August 2020

A psychedelic, free-spirited happening that is both scientifically exact and culturally far out

archive.org/download/ProteinSynthesis/ProteinSynthesis.mp4

'Initiator Factor Two!' The ecstatic cry, arising from a hippie band playing psychedelic music in a grassy field, greets a dancer in orange leotard and lemon tights as she takes her moment in the limelight. Emerging from a pulsating blob of bodies with anemone arms, she twirls, skips past a jiggly line of people with balloons tied to their heads, and handsprings towards a ragtag gaggle ('tRNA!' yelps the vocalist) who are in turn stringing along a shirtless guy in shorts and specs, capering like an imp ('Amino Acid!'). She tugs her group back towards the balloon people as another amorphous clump of bodies rolls towards them. A shaggy man in a wizard cloak joins hands with a – what is he, a snorkeller? – and they gallop about together. The narration is Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem *Jabberwocky* spiked with words from a cell biology textbook. There are puffs of smoke, a hooded jester, children and grown-ups, leaping women in bird-of-paradise sleeves; there is body paint and music, green grass and sunshine, and everyone seems euphorically happy.

Far out, as they might have said back then. *This will blow your mind.*

This is also a rather literal representation of protein synthesis.

Protein Synthesis: An Epic on the Cellular Level is a 13-minute dance film made in 1971, at Stanford University, in California's San Francisco Bay Area. Its three-minute introductory 'Protein Primer' features biochemistry professor (and future Nobel laureate) Paul Berg explaining protein coding and assembly, with the aid of a chalkboard diagram. His presentation is already clear and informative, so why the dance? 'My diagram is of necessity static,' he says, 'but protein synthesis is a dynamic process. This movie tries to bring those dynamic interactions to life.'

The choreographer who brought this dance to life was Initiator Factor Two herself, Jackie Benington. A dancer who went on to perform with Donald McKayle in the 1980s, Benington had won America's Junior Miss in 1969 (a peculiarly American combination of scholarship programme, talent competition and prom-queen coronation, now rebranded as 'Distinguished Young Women') and was taking a masters degree in education at Stanford. There she met – and later married – the film's director and band member Robert Alan (Gabriel) Weiss, then at Stanford's Medical School, who was looking for performers from the modern dance faculty for the project.

Benington gathered a small team of dancers to lead the choreographic segments – the ribosomes, the initiator factors, the protein releasing factor – but the vast majority of the 200 people who took part were untrained Stanford students. 'Fortified with complimentary wine', they seem as much unleashed as choreographed, and the joyous, free-festival energy that courses through









their rolls, runs and waves makes this the least clinical, most spirited of science-based dances you are ever likely to see.

Once seen, never forgotten, the film is not only a striking and remarkably durable illustration of protein synthesis, but a testament to a time, a place. Its music, 'The Protein Jive Sutra', has the psychedelic West Coast sound of The Doors or The Grateful Dead, while Jefferson Airplane's trippy hit *White Rabbit* was surely the stimulus for its Lewis Carroll text. If the anarchic, hallucinogenic spirit of the Merry Pranksters fires its engines, its ideals are more communal. While New York's experimental dance scene had its urbane Judson Dance Theatre, the West Coast had Anna Halprin and the San Francisco Dancers Workshop – more outdoorsy, more touchy-feely, combining togetherness with plurality, individuality with community.

In short, the film – educational tool, 'molecular happening', choreographic be-in – is both a scientifically exact model of protein synthesis and a poetic expression of the zeitgeist.

Fifty years on, protein synthesis – at the cellular level and on an epic scale – is now formative of our own zeitgeist: the Covid-19 virus uses this very same process to replicate inside the cell. Impossible to dance about that though, for it would require undistanced, communal choreography – and the virus has already put paid to that.

Not only a striking illustration of protein synthesis, but a testament to a time, a place

Moonrise Kingdom

Anastasio Koukoutas
24 September 2020

Pre-teen runaways dance on the beach of an unknown land called love

youtu.be/MQ4W71BepAI

Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012) isn't only a film about a childhood Eden, but also an ode to pure, unconditional love, free of the possessive disorders that indelibly mark our adult relationships. The film, typical of Anderson's 'technique' of cabinets des curiosités – that is, a macrocosm mirrored whimsically in a microcosm – is set around the romantic adventures of two twelve-year-old runaways, who remind us of the troubled awakenings that usually come with our adolescence. And if age could grace us with wisdom, then it is with Moonrise Kingdom that we discover the pleasure of returning wholeheartedly to the unfamiliarity of first love.

The movie is set in 'New Penzance', a remote terra incognita which, however, recalls so many pre-teen movies centred in small towns – here 'small' is intended both in scale but also in relation to the world within the world, as masterfully stylised by Anderson. Our heroes, Sam and Suzy, an odd couple indeed, carefully plot their getaway while exchanging love letters secretly. They are not your typical sweethearts: he, an orphan boy with glasses in a scout uniform, wearing his mother's pin instead of the usual accomplishment buttons and she, an adventurous spirit and avid book reader, matching her pink dress with a pair of



Publicity still (left) and screenshot (right) of Kara Hayward and Jared Gilman in Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*

binoculars. Both bear visible wounds of their troubled relationship with the adult world or, maybe, these are just marks that help them identify with each other. And most certainly, they are looking for love; not any kind of love, but the one that could give its name to a place that they might call their 'land'.

One of the most achingly poignant scenes of the film is when the two, safe in their idyllic seaside hideaway, cherish the overwhelming newness of first love and dance in their underwear. Françoise Hardy's 'Le temps de l'amour' coming out of the battery-powered phonograph is the ideal soundtrack to this short but emotionally giddy scene. Both are temperate in their swaying before the boy starts splurting his arms; out of synch but in tune with his feelings, he shows how clumsy our attempts to get closer can be. Having demonstrated his eccentric moves, Sam hurries to take Suzy in his arms, only to kiss her a few seconds later. They still learn, but they learn together: their tongues touch in kissing just as their bodies touch in dancing. Softly – yet the taste of the first kiss could be as bizarre as the taste of the first dance with the one you love. Lasting a moment, enchanting for a lifetime.

Suzy encourages him to touch her chest – their barely teenage bodies are a far cry from the carnal robust lust that is traced in adult coupling. His hands placed gently on her breasts, there's still no metaphor in



sensing each other: their gestures are so emphatically pure, as they are felt matter-of-factly. Anderson purposely keeps this scene short but dense, highlighting the fleeting moment in some over-the-shoulder angles, alternating views, merging sensations, letting us glimpse that primary and unique sharing before it is cut sharply back into the narration of the film.

Just as in the parting shot of the film, we realise that our memories are not representations of the past but how we give new life to experiences that have shaped who we are now. Moonrise Kingdom is about that haven – 'when time comes and goes', as the song has it – and how we still aim for that first enchantment despite our injuries. •

The taste of the first kiss could be as bizarre as the taste of the first dance with the one you love

POOL International Dance Film Festival

Beatrix Joyce
Evgeny Borisenko
16 October 2020

Highlights from the long-running Berlin dance film festival

pool-festival.de

POOL international dance film festival is Berlin's festival for dance shorts. Founded in 2007 and based at DOCK11, its reach grows every year. For the 2020 lineup, the jury selected 28 films from around 760 submissions. Beatrix Joyce and Evgeny Borisenko joined forces to watch the shortlisted films and the festival's selected 'Pearls' and 2020 prizewinners. They then met up to share their opinions at a fancy bar in Prenzlauer Berg. Read on to join them there...

EB: Beatrix, in the films you watched, did you notice any recurring motifs?

BJ: Although the majority of the films were made before the pandemic, I noticed that in this year's selection there was a running theme of solitude. There were many solos which seemed to revolve around self-expression in isolation, and the 'single dancer in the woods' was a recurring pattern. Sometimes this sense of isolation was creatively depicted, like in the flamenco-inspired piece *This Dance Has No End* by Fenia Kotsopoulou and Daz Disley. It was shot in black-and-white in a dark room, with the sound of the dancer's steps bouncing off the walls. There was a real sense of the body still having agency in this void, which spoke to me in these times of being thrust into the unknown.

Another film, *Betonhimmel* by Lukas Steltner, set in Berlin, featured an urban dancer on the streets, with the frame flipped so the sky was at the bottom and the dancer at the top. This placed the focus on the relationship between the city and the sky in an upward motion, and I found this movement towards the great, open sky uplifting. But with other films I found the combination of melancholia and loneliness hard to bear, especially while sitting in a theatre with single seats positioned at a 1.5 metre distance from each other.

EB: I also saw a few films that evoked the feeling of unrest and loneliness so present during the pandemic. For example, *Half Life* by Milena Twiehaus was not a video but just an ensemble of still shots with two dancers moving to romantic piano music that ends in a very poignant way: with photographs of windows shot from outside, set to the sound of friendly chat.

Four songs by Sita Ostheimer, a work which actually came about during the pandemic, was choreographed by video calls and consisted of four different vignettes, two solos and two duos. Shot in the studio, they were about dance and nothing else – quite different from the other films. It was really simply edited and produced, but the choreographic vocabulary was incredibly rich, with a constant building-up of intensity and a sheer visceral dance chemistry. I even thought that this is a piece I could really appreciate seeing on stage – not something I would say about the majority of the other films.



Uplifting: Lukas Steltner in *Betonhimmel*

And finally, there was another film that really stood out for me: *Breath to Breath* by **Miloushka Bokma**. Unlike the majority of films shot either in urban jungle or at a studio, this used a very theatrical setting – a sort of a greenhouse with an elevated amphitheatre of seats, but instead of spectators there were plastic bags full of water.

BJ: Yes, the films you are describing sound like they each have very different aesthetics. I enjoyed the diversity of formats. Some were art films while others were closer to music videos, where the editing and choreography expressed the music visually.

EB: I actually had the impression that there were too many 'music videos' – short illustrative dance elements set to music tracks lasting between two and six minutes. I kept asking myself: what would be the added value of those dance pieces on their own?

BJ: Indeed, when looking at them from an art perspective. But from the vantage point of pop culture, you could argue that this is an opportunity for mainstream music videos to actually incorporate contemporary dance, rather than stick to the usual narratives and choreographies.

EB: I also noted that there were quite a bunch of what I'd call 'dances in a studio' filmed with one long shot against a monochrome backdrop with little to no research in terms of filming or editing. Though these dance-in-studio films were made before the pandemic, they again reminded me of our current situation: this must be the only way many artists are getting to show their work.

BJ: In terms of format, I think an interesting comparison can be made with the Aerowaves FRAMEWORKS festival that took place online in June 2020. FRAMEWORKS consisted of commissioned



An uncanny theatrical setting for Miloushka Bokma's *Breath to Breath*

works by Aerowaves artists, created as a response to the pandemic and as a means to move dance online. There were some very interesting pieces by artists, like Joy Alpuerto Ritter & Lukas Steltner and Masako Matsushita, that explored how we can expand the format of dance film by means of positioning laptop cameras in different rooms or using screen videos of internet browsers. At POOL, there was not so much crossover into the digital realm. However, a film I found exemplary in its approach to editing, was *Falling* by Qian Min, which was one of the 'Pearls'. There was a really beautiful coherence between the dancer's movements and how the editor was interpreting that, in terms of rhythm and pacing. For example, a shot of the dancer's head falling slowly was followed by a shot of a chair toppling over, so in this way the movement was continued across shots.

EB: Yes, a short video about dance is actually a very difficult exercise. It's not only about the medium of dance and choreography, it can also encompass spoken word, setting, and finally also of course filming and editing. Some of the films didn't take into account the mixture of all those mediums which, even taken separately, require a huge amount of different skills. It became evident to me that for many dance makers it was a big challenge to juggle dance, film and music and produce a well-balanced dance film. Sometimes the film editing was a bit raw, sometimes the accent was exclusively placed on dance or on music. That is why some works felt like trailers for a full-length film, and others like Instagram-edited snippets.

BJ: And how about politics?

EB: What I noticed is the near absence of films with a strong political statement. The only one that really stood out for me was *Never Twenty One* by Kevin Gay, Henri Coutant and Smaïl Kanouté. Making use of spoken word, including statistical data and real stories, it tackles the issue of gun violence in American suburbs, where a young person of colour has statistically more chances to get shot down in the streets than a US soldier in Afghanistan. We see a young man dancing in the streets, then in claustrophobically narrow corridors, the dance consisting of constant trembling, violent kicks, twists and twirls. On his skin, lots of words are written in white chalk, like tattoos. In the end, though, we see him on a theatre stage and here the film loosened its grip for me: it has suddenly become a bit too narrational. Anyway, it was the only one of the films I saw to have such a strong political statement, and it was very poignant and masterfully made.

BJ: Yeah, I think the way he shifted his hands so that the words 'love' and 'hate' were alternately visible, was very clever. I kept reading new things into his tattoos.

EB: There was also 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' written on his skin!

BJ: I agree that that moment he's in the theatre takes us a little bit out of the reality of the streets.

BJ: The city played also played a very instrumental role in *Risques* by Thomas Gerard, featuring the African-American dancer in Paris.

EB: And afterwards we were taken on a very different journey with *Lunar* by the award-winning duet Daniele Caetano and Natasha Vergilio – a real video art piece.

BJ: Yeah, *Lunar* engendered a mesmerising, mystic atmosphere. As it was set in the forest, I was immediately imagining a witch, as the protagonist was somewhat androgynous and their figure was hard to make out in the ominous darkness. The piece was playing with light and shadow, illuminating the body and the skin in different ways.

EB: I still remember that scene when we see overlaid videos of a hand cautiously touching a bare torso, both being translucent. This intricate film trick depicted so well the disconnection of physicality and the lack of human touch we are all living through at the moment. In other films this feeling of loneliness was present only in a very literal way, and *Lunar* moves it into a truly symbolic dimension.

BJ: I just want to ask you one more question – about emotion. The genre of dance film sets itself apart from cinema by the difference in approach to narrative: dance films don't necessarily require a narrative, or if there is one, it's more fragmented, like in *Never Twenty One*. So I'm wondering, does that allow us to perceive a more visceral emotional layer, or is it the narrative in cinema that powerfully draws us in?

EB: I think it depends on the quality of the films. The emotional aspect was very aptly translated through choreography in four songs, and through filming rhythm, colours and dense cutting in *Lunar* (in which we hardly see any 'dance' per se). And *Never Twenty One* is so powerful and emotional mainly because of the script and the relationship between the text and the image. So there are numerous channels to explore.

We already talked a bit about the importance of these short films for the artists, but I was also asking myself about their place in the saturated art scene. We can see short videos featuring choreography in art museums, where they frequently form part of larger installations. They are also used for promotional purposes on the artists' websites. But the films we have seen this week at POOL go way beyond these forms, and there were more than 760 films submitted for the competition. I would love to ask all the makers what they each think of the place this fragile and mutable art form occupies in their practice, and in the art world in general, for it already seems that this is really a unique and niche genre.

I would love to ask what place this fragile and mutable art form occupies in their practice, and in the art world in general

Act of Love

Stella Mastorosteriou
22 October 2020

Animal courtship transformed into human choreography – to advertise condoms

youtu.be/HIFpt7k1oLI

What would it look like if humans flirted and mated like animals do? 'Act of Love – Animal Courtships Performed by Humans' is a funny and romantic ad for condoms in the form of a dance video, which interprets courting rituals from the animal kingdom into beautifully performed dances.

A young couple, both in yellow shirts, is sitting on a bench, on the riverside of a busy city. They are touching amorously, cheek to cheek, nose to nose, neck to neck, indifferent to the surprised looks of passers-by. A man and a woman dressed in black and white meet on the street – the man approaching with widespread steps as she moves her shoulders and hips seductively. A man, all in white, circles around a woman, catching her attention – they carry on moving elegantly around each other. Another couple rhythmically steps sideways on a staircase, locking eyes, stepping in the way of people who are climbing down the stairs. Under a bridge, a couple dressed in brown hues engages in a fluid, tango-like duet. A small group of people appears on the sidewalk, all dressed in pink, marching together at the same hasty pace, sharply turning their heads left, right, up, down. On the way they are joined by more people in pink, and form a larger flock. They make no eye contact, and there is a funny synchronicity in the way they move and pause together, lifting one leg off the ground.

As the little street performances develop, the dance – by acclaimed UK choreographer Russell Maliphant – highlights details suggested by animal movement: sharp bird-like changes in the movement of heads, intricate footwork, large wing-flapping accentuated by the use of overcoats and playful mammal





> **Much like in real-life courtships, some encounters escalate passionately, others end in disappointment**





Dancers filmed at London's Southbank in Russell Maliphant's choreography for Sagami's 'Acts of Love'

movements, all delivered with a certain balletic nonchalance and a cartoonish sense of longing by the brilliant performers. The waltz melody adds to the feelgood mood of the video. Filmed on London's South Bank, the urban setting works as a metaphor for the natural habitat – and it allows for reaction shots of amused passers-by. Much like in real-life courtships – of both humans and animals – some of the encounters escalate passionately, and others end in disappointment. The two-minute video is worth watching till the very end, for an elucidating comparison between clips of actual animal courting and their choreographic interpretation.

Act of Love is part of 2016 campaign by Sagami Original Rubber Industries. The Japanese condom company released the video along with a website and a book exploring and celebrating the variety of animal courtship behaviour. According to the advertising agency, their intent was to build a branded communication without directly advertising the product's function. Thus, they worked with the concept of animal mating, instead of directly addressing human mating, making a point on the naturalness of the act (of love).

Yet if we interpret the animal couples back into human terms, what we get in this ad are all heterosexual couples (apart from the flamingo flock), with each couple of similar physical appearance. Given the premise of naturalness implicit in the advertising of 'the world's thinnest condom', this risks reinforcing racial and sexual stereotypes of what 'normal' attraction should be. Might not a more unbiased coupling from the cast of dancers be more inclusive, while no less funny, romantic – and human? •

Giri/Haji

Emily May
17 November 2020

The BBC/Netflix drama is another example of mainstream media turning to contemporary dance for inspiration

youtu.be/cvYBaiJ1KQ

'We were so shocked and wondered what was happening,' said my parents over the phone. 'We looked at each other and said: I think it's contemporary dance!' They were recounting the final sequence of the crime thriller series Giri/Haji, excited at identifying the art form. Not having seen it yet, I promised to watch it on Netflix and get back to them to confirm their suspicions.

Translating from Japanese as Duty/Shame, *Giri/Haji* follows two central protagonists: Detective Kenzo Mori and his brother Yuto, whom he believes to be deceased. After a few episodes it transpires that Yuto is in fact alive, living in London, and has recently killed the son of a Tokyo Yakuza boss. Having been made to look like the work of a rival gang leader, the murder causes discord between the Tokyo gangs, who threaten to launch bloody warfare if the true culprit isn't revealed and brought back to Japan. The task to find Yuto falls to Kenzo who, during his trip to London, ends up torn between personal and professional duties.

After a whirlwind eight episodes featuring a variety of subplots – including a run-in with the Albanian mafia, and Kenzo's daughter Taki running away from home to join her father in the UK, befriending troubled but lovable rent boy Rodney in the process – the series climaxes on a London rooftop, with one character – no spoilers! – considering jumping to their death. As they stumble, a group of others run to catch them and the screen fades to black and white, signifying a transition into a more abstract realm. Melancholic string music ensues, and the characters engage in a variety of dramatic movement sequences.

While it may seem like a tall order to ask untrained dancers to break out into movement, the naturalistic, interaction-based choreography by Liam Steel – a core member of DV8 Physical Theatre from 1992 to 2000 and, more recently, the choreographer behind film and stage productions including Tom Hooper's film of *Les Misérables* and the Birmingham Rep's theatre production of *The Wizard of Oz* – makes it easy for the actors to adapt, especially considering that physical theatre is a style many of them may have encountered at drama school.

Focusing on interpersonal relationships and emotions rather than the intricacies of the Yakuza plot, the scene choreographically reflects on the narrative of the entire series, starting with a duet between Kenzo and Yuto. Supportive lifts and counterbalances are performed alongside aggressive hand grips and shoves, the contrasting movements poetically depicting their ambivalent relationship.

Other characters are introduced into view. The brothers' late father appears, arms outstretched towards Yuto, his favoured son, causing Kenzo to reel off in dejection. He rolls into the back of his London love interest, who tenderly cups his face and





spirals around his body, until they are broken up by Kenzo's daughter Taki, distressed by her father's infidelity. She subsequently gets caught up in a strained trio with her father and mother who, imprisoned by each other's limbs, stare at each other with steely eyes. It's an effective portrayal of how children can bind couples together, even when they realise that they possibly no longer should be.

Meetings between characters continue to run seamlessly, until, over time, a cosmos of coexisting interactions and interceptions is revealed. The camera lens – almost like a choreographed dancer itself—orbits around the characters, its continuous motion creating a sense of temporal progression allowing events that had occurred over numerous years to be deftly recounted in a scene lasting no more than three minutes. At times, the camera gets up close and personal, showing the emotion in the actors' eyes and the intricacies of their movements – whether their touches are tender or strained, for example. At other times, it pans out to give a bird's-eye view, to survey the complex cobweb of relationships that has evolved over the course of the series.

> **The scene choreographically reflects on the narrative of the entire series**

A bloody crime thriller may not seem like the natural home for a conclusive interpretive dance, but it makes more sense when you consider Giri/Haji's experimental approach to filmic storytelling: throughout the whole series there are a variety of animé-style flashbacks, and an inventive use of splitscreens. According to series creator Joe Barton, the decision to include the dance sequence was also made because he didn't want his characters to suddenly be able to express themselves verbally. 'I see [Giri/Haji] as a story about people who feel a lot of things but don't have the words for them,' he said in an interview with Crime Files. 'I ... thought that this was a way of having them put out their innermost wants and desires without ever actually saying the words.'

Contemporary dance is, in general, gaining more prevalence in the mainstream media, whether through BBC Arts' diverse 2020 dance season or the new Netflix series Move profiling dancers and choreographers from around the world, or even in music videos by musicians such as Christine and the Queens or Beyoncé. This is giving the perceived niche art form of contemporary dance a platform in the popular culture sphere, and undoubtedly does wonders for its accessibility. For me, it's even more exciting to see choreography being used within dramas to aid narratives: it allows people who are unfamiliar with dance to be taken by surprise, and to be introduced to the artform without being deterred by potentially off-putting programme descriptions. Will *Giri/Haji* inspire other television dramas to try out similar methods of non-verbal storytelling? I hope so.

Permanent Vacation

Anastasio Koukoutas
02 February 2021

Dance brings a moment of presence within the dream of a world adrift

youtu.be/ubsRnOzN10s

‘Life has no plot, why must film or fiction?’ – probably the frankest, simplest aporia towards any strict plotlines capturing life and its cinematic representation. Just to rephrase Jarmusch’s question: if life is a series of serendipities, why not embrace the riddle instead of figuring out the answer? *Permanent Vacation* (1980) is the first feature film of the American independent director Jim Jarmusch, but somehow it is already imbued with what became the signature style of his cinematic oeuvre: the slow, meandering pace of the unfolding story, the mystical yet mundane encounters between individuals, the presence of music and sound not just as an added layer to the picture but as an essential undertone to a whole spectrum of senses.



But if a story has no plot, what makes it a story? Who is it about and how do we follow the character? Here, it is hard to say if there is any goal to the go-nowhere existence of the main character, Chris Parker. We get that he is mainly a drifter, a post-industrial *flâneur*, but not exactly in the way Baudelaire saw himself in the Paris of the late nineteenth century. His itinerary in a post-apocalyptic New York City seems to be part imaginary, part realistic; maybe drifting is his way to survive in an uncanny, hostile world. A psychically traumatised soldier, a mentally deranged woman, a street saxophonist, a hospitalised mother suffering dementia parade in the film and although we don't know what thread connects them, there's a recurring theme and mood adhering to the many accidental encounters that try to fit into the story. It might be a kind of bitterness, the disarming sense that life murders dreams, or a joyous yet cruel feeling of being awake in a fuzzy, dream-like situation.

There's a wonderful scene capturing this alluring contradiction almost at the beginning of the film. It's the only scene inside Parker's apartment, who otherwise spends his life 'just walking around' because of lack of sleep. His (presumed) girlfriend is smoking a cigarette and looking purposelessly outside the window – a frame so elegant that one cannot avoid thinking it's extracted from a Hopper painting – and asks him where has he been all night. Their dialogue is brief, reproducing all those mumbles, vacuums or silences we often find in any normal, daily conversation. Maybe it is the predominant silence which Parker wants to break as he turns to the record player. As soon as the vinyl starts turning, he responds to the beat, clicking his fingers to attune to the saxophone groove.

His impro dance is an act of transformation; only in retrospect do we realise that this is a moment of genuine carefree being which otherwise becomes swollen with aimless drifting and repetitive mood swings. His response to the bebop tune electrifies his body, he starts swirling, knees bent inwards, torso slightly inclined forward, head flapping from one side to the other. He does let himself be carried away by the rhythm – so much that he lets himself fall to the ground – but somehow his body is loose, weightless, and the fall doesn't register as sad or melancholic. He stands up again and kicks off his shoes for the last bit of the music. The tune fades, his arms spread as if flying and a 'phew' is uttered – an exclamation to that unexpected yet much needed outburst.

The moment the music is off, he turns to the mirror, his attitude 'straightened' as if he had confided an aspect we shouldn't be aware of. Just as youth frequently disguises any pain or fear, vaingloriously boasting 'live fast', Parker probably can't yet recognise his own frail figure in the mirror – his dreams rushing ahead, still not aware that life is indeed lived fast, and dreams are murdered every day.

If a story has no plot, what makes it a story? Who is it about and how do we follow the character?

Thessaloniki Cinedance International 2020

Stella Mastorosteriou
09 February 2021

In a city with a reputation for film festivals, the third Thessaloniki Cinedance International festival focuses on artistic crossover

Thessaloniki, Greece

die-wolke.org/tci

The third edition of Thessaloniki Cinedance International (TCI) took place in October 2020, just before the second round of Covid lockdown in Greece put a halt to all cultural activities.

TCI is an independent annual festival presenting screendance works from around the world to the local audience. Launched in 2018 by the local non-profit Die Wolke art group, it is currently the only videodance festival in a city with a well-known International Film Festival and a plethora of other annual screen festivals on documentaries, animation, short films, music films, and more.

According to Die Wolke, TCI aspires to present innovative ideas about how the ever-evolving cinematic medium can employ dance, and how choreographers and performers can use the moving image – leading to an evolution of the language of this artistic crossover.

The third edition of the festival featured 38 films from 18 countries. Rather than have an overall theme for the festival, the organisers are primarily concerned with the use of cinematic techniques and technologies, and their combination with choreography and performance: 'Idea, image, sound, composition, choreography, interpretation, are the main axes that shape the choice. Many times, however, the meaning or value of a work resides among them, so the aforementioned criteria are not a set rule.' Due to Covid regulations, in addition to the screenings, the works were also available online on demand – a platform the festival plans to maintain in the future.

Jessica Wright and Morgann Runacre-Temple's *Tremble* (UK) is a light, comical short film produced and performed by Scottish Ballet. An unrevealed power takes possession of the guests at a fancy dinner party, secretly capturing them one by one and transforming them into dancing waiters and waitresses. Taking place in an abstract dining room set on a theatre stage, the rigorous and highly technical waitressing ballet is juxtaposed with the slow motion of the guests at this decadent party.

The overall aesthetics of the film, the expressiveness of the characters, the use of colour and the kaleidoscopic choreographic patterns bring to mind Wes Anderson movies. The humorous cartoonish movement quality is enhanced with the use of reverse motion at specific moments of the choreography, giving supernatural abilities to the dancers. By the end, a troupe of waiters is serving 'trembling' red jelly to the sole remaining guest. As they struggle to balance the jelly on their silver plates, the tremble transfers to their dancing until the whole group shaking like jelly on a plate.

Tremble was created for the company's Digital Season programme, a platform dedicated to creating and presenting dance

works specifically for the digital realm, as an attempt to make dance more accessible and to alter and inform the way we experience it as viewers – an objective that becomes urgent now, in the Covid era.

In *A Concrete Song* (UK), dancer and choreographer **Oona Doherty** composes a poetic reflection on her hometown, Belfast. A concrete song is also the title of her original poem that we hear her reciting in the two-minute film, along with an underlying music score.

Dressed in a leather jacket, sweatpants and sneakers, Doherty guides us around the pubs, night clubs and streets of Belfast. A lonely figure in a seemingly empty town, she animates these various spaces with her dancing. Her movement language, detailed and gestural, combines with the words of the poem and the urban imagery to portray a city full of contradictions.

> *'All at the same time nothing*
> *the adrenaline future*
> *small town*
> *generational cellular imbalance*
> *hail to the dot*
> *an inward shove*
> *fucking Belfast love.'*

The camera follows her explosive dancing, in close-ups that highlight sharp gestures and intense facial expressions, and in distant travelling shots that reveal the stillness of the spaces and the dancer's loneliness. The ways in which she distorts her body and face reveal an internal state that contradicts the quiet around her.



Jessica Wright and Morgann Runacre-Temple's *Tremble*, for Scottish Ballet

Human loneliness in the urban environment is also central in **Klaas Diersmann**'s *Divided We Scroll* (UK), investigating our relationship to our screens and devices, and the ways we stay connected through technology but remain physically distant. It is part of the Life Rewired programme at London's Barbican Centre, which explores 'what it means to be human when technology is changing everything.'

In the five-minute film, Diersmann depicts a familiar world through a dystopian lens: people in the metro and other public spaces, unsmiling faces, eyes locked onto



their screens. Even as they start gradually moving with spasmodic motions, each one is fully absorbed into their phones, without the slightest interaction with anyone else. The movement becomes smoother as the individuals merge into a mass of bodies and phones that melts towards the floor. The dystopian ambience is accentuated by the lighting: dark spaces and nightscapes dimly lit, the glow of phone screens reflecting on faces, and futuristic sculptures formed by blue fluorescent lamps against the dark sky.

Shots of massive modern architecture alternate with the scenery of an urban garden full of tropical green plants. The ambience is calm and quiet, but the dancers' movement is still reminiscent of the dependence on technology. Their eyes are closed and they no longer hold their phones, but their hands mechanically perform the scrolling and tapping micromovements they are used to. Scattered shots of hands caressing leaves and dancers moving slowly together, in touch with each other, provide some grounding and a break from the dystopia.

Jo Kreiter's The Wait Room (Flyaway Productions, USA) deals with the experience of women who have family members spending time in prison. Shot in black and white and set in front of an immense building – possibly a prison complex – all action takes place on a special mechanical construction. Four dancers are sitting on chairs, one of them elevated higher up on the construction. An auditory rhythm builds up, composed of clock strikes, melodic fragments and repeated words.

'And so you are waiting.' This introductory phrase, repeated over and over in combination with the initial stillness of the dancers, establishes the concept of the film: time, and a sense of indisposition against the prison system. As the voiceover unfolds, we listen to the thoughts and comments of different women on their experiences of the prison institutions and their consequences – psychological, social and financial. The dancers perform recurring gestural motifs that respond to the rhythmic soundscape and reflect the character and the content of the text.

As the film evolves, the choreography employs the concept of suspension as a metaphor for the state these women find themselves in. The set construction becomes a huge spinning top and a dancer performs an acrobatic solo around it, suspended with a rope. There is beautiful lightness in her movement and at the same time a sense of risk and vulnerability. The film ends with another dancer

suspended from the construction – she stays still while perpetually spinning around it.

Vincent René-Lortie's *The Man Who Traveled Nowhere in Time* (CA), made with Montreal's Trip the Light Fantastic dance company, also explores the concept of time and our subjective perception of it. A group of dancers inhabit a large country house. The camera guides us around the different rooms, where various stories and relationships unfold: a silhouette solo at the entrance, a fighting duet in the bedroom, an agonising group dance on the staircase, a conversing duet in the living room. A female voice narrates a story about a man who 'never moved, never changed, never became anything different.' Detailed, realistic scenography and soft lighting contrast with the bizarre scenes: a woman emerging naked from the bathtub, a man lying naked on a table, another struggling with himself in the garden.

Left: Klaas Diersmann's *Divided We Scroll*

Below: Vincent René-Lortie's *The Man Who Traveled Nowhere in Time*



The choreography alternates abrupt interpretative hand motions and facial expressions with agile partnering duets. The emotionally intense performance of the dancers, accentuated by oblique camera angles and quick cuts, create an urgency which escalates towards the finale, much like in a nightmarish dream.

This year's programme also featured short films created and themed around the first 2020 quarantine. Giorgia Damasco's *Back Home* (IT) and Kailee McMurran's *Catherine* (USA) both deal with the concept of home and the ways we interact with our personal spaces, which in turn shape our identities. In *Back Home*, a woman explores her balcony as a potential living space. The stop-motion accumulation of stuff around her brings on a commentary on what is necessary for living and what becomes a burden. *Catherine* is a witty short, where a woman is gradually revealed to be a cat – the metaphor brilliantly achieved through McMurran's uncanny performance of cat actions and reactions.

As Covid restrictions continue around the world and creators continue to explore this new sense of confinement with their cameras, this new category of quarantine works might pop up more often in future screendance festivals. •

Us



Ka Bradley
23 February 2021

Double trouble in the climactic dance scene of Jordan Peele's 2019 horror

youtu.be/Kmsb731O-q8

Horror frequently draws on aesthetic disruption. The sinister undermining of the ordinary is one of its most reliable, effective and layered tropes: clowns are not the playmates of the circus, but the casing around a carnivorous child-snatcher; the Mayday parade is not a blossom-strewn celebration of spring but a floral front for human sacrifice; don't even get started on the Catholic church. In *Us* (2019), director Jordan Peele takes this one step further and offers us the mundane and its uncanny reflection side by side. The scary monsters are doppelgangers of ordinary people, living abject, gruesome lives underground, tethered to their mundane counterparts by some mysterious but inexorable force. Peele toys exquisitely with aesthetic disruption in the climactic fight scene, fixing on two art forms with such recognisable and celebrated aesthetics that their fearful remix is already ominous: hip hop music and balletic dance.

In *Us*, Adelaide Wilson (Lupita Nyong'o) and her family flee a gang of the murderous doppelgangers, who have been killing their real-world counterparts across the town. She eventually tracks her own doppelganger – named Red – to an abandoned fairground, all the while assailed by traumatic but incomplete childhood memories of this very place. Beneath the fairground is a crude double of the world above: doppelganger hell. She confronts Red in a subterranean schoolroom.

Adelaide is exhausted and bloodied. She moves as she is: injured, partially incapacitated, panicked. By contrast, Red marches like a clockwork soldier. Not a twitch, not a shudder is wasted on the physical manifestations of human emotion. She does not even appear angry – merely efficient. When she lunges with scissors towards Adelaide, when she catches a chair against her foot, when she dispatches Adelaide with a slap or a stab, she is perfectly, terrifyingly controlled.

They move to the sound of an orchestral remix of the mid-90s hip-hop hit 'I Got 5 On It' by Luniz (played in its original form earlier in the film). It is plucked out on strings and distorted by short screams of reverb. The fact that it is still recognisable is what makes it so uncanny. Whatever aesthetic the original evoked has been dragged under the ground to the same dark place Adelaide is fighting for her life. The familiar music is under unfamiliar control; it is the audio equivalent of possession by the unholy.

The fight is interspersed with flashbacks of two ballet performances. In one, the young Adelaide (Ashley McKoy), pristine in a white tutu, pirouettes with girlish grace across a stage. In the other, young Red spins wildly across a gore-streaked corridor, halting when her hand hits the wall – like all doppelgangers, she



is tethered to her counterpart and forced to mimic the broad outlines of her life. (In an interview, the scene's choreographer, Madeline Hollander, said it is 'as if the dancer on top, in the theatre, was dragging around the dancer below via a magnet'.) Adelaide, unknowing, drags Red back and forth across the corridor like a marionette. As the scene flickers from ballet to fight, we see that the women have had their roles reversed: now it is Adelaide who stumbles through the corridor, limbs barely under her control, while Red moves with clipped technique and certainty.

Adelaide clumsily swings a poker and misses. She screams with the effort. Red ducks like a soldier, strikes a pose like a mime, pliés like a ballerina out of range of another swing. In flashback, white tutu Adelaide executes a charming developpé, and young Red drags herself along the floor on her stomach. We witness the dismantling and morbid reconstitution of an old choreography, which began when young Adelaide leapt joyously above ground, forcing her young doppelganger's body back and forth like a marionette. Red never had the pleasure of attending ballet classes and formalising her technique; she can only grotesquely echo the body above ground, forced, by some insane theory of trickle-down humanity, to ape a great art form. In the present day, murder on her mind, Red has taken the idea of technique and of choreography and turned them into weapons. She leads the dance now, but the ballet is deadly.

This sense is echoed in the closing scenes of the fight, as the music slows to a growl. As the younger versions of the two women spin and shudder, their movements produce the sounds of blades being unsheathed and blunt instruments swinging through the air. This dance was always a fight, and these girls were always locked in battle. •

Mulholland Drive

Yasen Vasilev
xx April 2021

Dance can slip through the nets of convention and identity – just like the films of David Lynch

youtu.be/_s6vFmk7fkE



In its 20th anniversary year, *Mulholland Drive* has already been voted the best film of the 21st century in a BBC critics poll. Named after a road in the Hollywood hills, famous for its celebrities, the film is set in Los Angeles where, as director David Lynch once noted, there are jokes about how everyone is writing a script. Yet for Lynch, the people are yearning not necessarily for fame, but for self-expression.

In a 2020 interview, Naomi Watts, one of the film's stars, said that after 10 years unsuccessfully auditioning in LA she 'didn't know who she was any more' until she was offered the role in *Mulholland Drive*. The line is echoed in the movie itself: 'I don't know who I am'. In the movie, though, this loss of self is reclaimed as a creative act, the opposite of the exhaustion of the fixed, self-expressing subject.

That loss or unknowing sounds 'Lynchian' – a word that has come to indicate surrealist techniques imposed on everyday American life to reveal the corruption behind the façade. Dance in his films has been perceived as part of this nightmarish reality or as an expression of the inner world of characters. But that's not all that it does.

Mulholland Drive opens with a hypnotic jitterbug dance contest scene, where dancing shadows, retro dance footage and Naomi Watts with an elderly couple are superimposed, one on top of the other, on a purple screen. The interplay between dancers and their shadows, who take on a life of their own, foreshadows the way the dramaturgy of the movie will be set in motion – with characters slipping out of identities and with a constant doubling of characters, scenes, locations, lines and recurring details.

Actually, what's so eerie about this scene is not only the doubling effect but the way the jitterbug, a dance once considered uncivilised and out of control, today looks quite formalised and structured. It reveals bodies moved by ideology, with roles and movements prescribed, and with a lot of social pressure hidden behind the cheerful jumping. There is very little free will in these social interactions. This is what Naomi Watts' character, with her naive smile, doesn't yet know but will learn the hard way (think of one of the film's last scenes, where she is a misfit in a carefully choreographed Hollywood party).

This cryptic movie spawned numerous interpretive theories, the most common

> **The jitterbug, once considered uncivilised and out of control, today looks quite formalised**

ones privatising the dream story within a psychotic consciousness, even though Lynch continuously stresses the experience over the message, and refuses to discuss the meanings of the film. Privatisation obscures this critique. For before they were stripped of ideology and co-opted as pure aesthetic, surrealist techniques of manipulating form had a political stance.

Lynch's movies are an aesthetic deconstruction of the American dream and the society of winners and losers it produces – epitomised best by Hollywood, whose industry has been one of the two legs exporting it internationally, the other being the military complex. Lynch often reinforces cinematic clichés only to fail our expectations; he works within tradition in order to subvert it. By inventing interventions on the level of form, he performs critique, while at the same time creating an alternative.

I first saw *Mulholland Drive* when I was making my own first attempts at scriptwriting. I remember being struck by the characters swapping names and identities, and thinking: oh, you can actually do that? Without any consequences? It felt liberating and game-changing. Even more telling was that this level of freedom came from lost funding – *Mulholland Drive* was actually a rejected pilot for a new TV series which then found French funding and turned into a full-length feature. It is



a good reminder of the autonomy of art, its power to disrupt the established order and rehearse new realities.

Lynch offers his characters a fluidity of identity in a world where they're not fixed into socially determined categories. Fantasy can thus be interpreted not only as an escape from reality, but as a creative act of reimagining: reality as it could be. Lynch doesn't stick to one option or the other. His movie is not only a critique of power structures, not only an empathic psychological exploration of failure, not only a queer love story; it is all of those at the same time, and it defies any attempt to be fit into a (blue) box: 'It's an experience, not an intellectual thing.'

The same can be said about dance. It is embodied but it transcends the self, identity and social standing. It is a concrete language of abstraction that has the potential not only to express and reflect but to reimagine the world and set it in motion, redistributing affects to both performers and audiences. •

ABOUT



Contributors

Editorial

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