

Georgia

Vandakou

"Phenomena"

MDT program texts

The program texts is a series of unedited fanzine-style booklets available on the MDT website and in a limited cost price edition, printed, folded and stapled on MDT's Konica Minolta All-in-one Copier.

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Few years ago I engaged in a piece of research called 'Hardcore Research on Dance'. During this research I analyzed and refined the personal material that I carry as a performer in my body. The result was a short solo presented during MOVE ME at STUK/ Leuven (BE) where I exhibited as in anthropological research the ways I move, dance or just be and present myself on stage. The perceptive result was a linear but not descriptive story of a body.

I then realized that this process which I went through produces very strong material with a lot of meanings in it. And it was these meanings that made me be sure about the fact that they are material for performance. That's how 'Phenomena' started.



PHENOMENA

The prequel research (*Hardcore Research on Dance*)

During the research period of 'Hardcore Research on Dance' I tried to trace the origins of my dance. The origins of what in the dance world would be referred as the 'personal movement'. There is no specific definition of it but in the frame of this research I defined as such:



'Personal movement' is the combination of movements that one performs by improvising on silence, outside of any predefined context, choreography or score of any kind. Consequently these movements, since they are not based on a specific context, find their origins in the performers past both as a social person and as a dancer. By past I mean everything his nationality, cultural influences, family, education, dance techniques, work etc including all details within them like specific influential people or teachers, books, other art pieces and how all of these form and affect the psychological past of this person. So the specificity of his past in combination with the specificity of his body type direct in a way the specific decisions this person is taking results in him performing each movement in a specific therefore personal way.

There are of course always some influences on the choices according to the environment and the present time of the dance. However the more I practiced on this area the more these influences became a secondary element while specific patterns, ways of moving or even one specific movement would always come back no matter what the hour, the studio or the day was. Consequently these insistent patterns became strong visual examples of my 'personal movement'. Words like habits or obsessions could come in mind but they only partly fit because both often insinuate that they are involuntary and that would create a misunderstanding. Because what was finally being analyzed was an accumulation of conscious choices through the years about how to organize and perform movements, so clearly about how I consciously see, perceive and perform contemporary dance.

The outcome of this research was soon visible through the presentation of the solo. A body moving or pausing, in an unpredictable way and rhythm. The movement at times is calm and minimal resembling actions to big technical, movements crossing the space hectically. Material interchange in a quite quick pace. The spectator can see content through these movements. Content vary according to the different nature of the material. Each material involves differently the body parts, its qualities and the presence. Therefore some can be read more as an impression or an intention and some can carry meanings or strong connotations. Through the time the body starts revealing aspects of a character, or a protagonist of a book from which you flip pages randomly but you still get an impression of a story.

The conclusion is that each body reveals through its personal movement its very own contents.

"The mantra of Sartrean humanism, echoed by Camus and de Beauvoir, is that you can always make something out of what you've been made into"

Thomas R. Flynn, "Existentialism"

This view mirrors how 'personal movement' works. We are made of 'things' (influences, education, culture etc.), so in a way we could fit in categories of people which have been made of similar or the same things. However when it comes into deciding and eventually, in this case creating something, this something is completely subjective in an existentialist's perspective. And that's what keeps my drive for contemporary dance. All the different subjective ways of moving, distillations of incoming influences, which become conscious ways of communicating with audiences. Opposite of communicating through an established, dated technique I think that the dancer's body should, by absorbing knowledge and techniques, later decide for himself how and if he should use them at all in order to create his own personal and contemporary language.

The trio (*Phenomena*)

The content of movement

The way one reads dance as a viewer is a personal matter and varies. The way one exhibits his dance in order to be read is a unique intention. I'm interested in a moving body which tries to 'speak'. I'm not interested in speech, mime or theatricality as such but there are areas in the borders of what I'm trying to describe that touches them. I want that my dancers and I articulate movements like a gifted talker articulates speech. I want each movement to be direct and visually clear. To think of the intention of a movement, as in how to perform a movement, it means that there is already s/g to be communicated through movement and the right intention supports it. Therefore what is there to be communicated in combination with the right intention gives us what the viewer sees; content. Content to be read. Read as in experienced and not necessarily as in being interpreted.

"Content is a glimpse of something, an encounter like a flash. It's very tiny – very tiny, content."

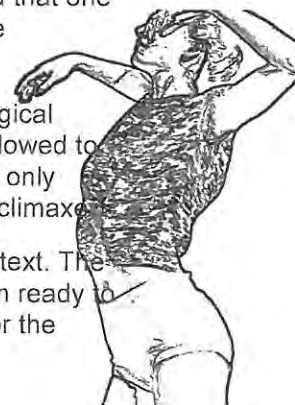
Willem de Kooning, in an interview
from the epigraph of Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation"

It was a real adventure while, during my research, I was committed to look for the origins and the content of my dance and their possible relations. I made a lot of different sketches with possible origins and their interconnections. Then I decided that the content of movements is somehow associated/linked to these origins because sometimes there would be a visible physical proof. However I couldn't always trace back to where each movement came from and that's towards the end

of the research when next to education and other factors I added 'unidentified element' in my notebook. There was content appearing that I had to accept it as mine and invite people to observe it. This means that there are some content appearing while one dances which express s/g beyond oneself or differently put, the dancer cannot be constantly and fully as self aware and movement-meaning controller as I thought it could be and I'm glad for that. For in the end of my day is what makes the medium of dance inexhaustible. To conclude, I don't think there is one sole description for the entire panorama of one's dance but I realized that one can find content in parts of his dance, in units of movement or in one sole movement.

These contents comprised the context of the solo and stood as dramaturgical tools which during, were all, recognizable or not, meaningful or absurd allowed to be seen and experienced in silence. The material spoke for itself and the only manipulation of these tools was in order to create tensions or rhythmical climaxes.

Nowadays I know that these contents can create their own sphere of context. The step that I didn't fully take before, since it was not a creation and that I am ready to take with this trio, is composition. To further manipulate these contents for the sake of a narrative.



Premeditated Kinetic Improvisation

The method with which I mostly work since my studies, through my work and until now is premeditated kinetic improvisation. This term does not exist. I invented it, out of a need to differentiate it from various other ways of improvising like contact improvisation or improvisation as in not planned or rehearsed.

This kind of improvisation is both a way to produce new material but also a way of practicing 'performing qualities' and 'instant composition of movements'. By committing in improvisation as a practice one allows new possibilities of material to come up. Often though, it is also about the continuation and improvement of acquired material which in its turn becomes as well a system of regeneration of material, only more gradually. That is because the starting point of a day can often be acquired knowledge. For if one's starting point is the acquired material **A**, the next day becomes **B**, therefore is much related and can be read as a variation of **A**. The third day it becomes **C** and it is still somehow related to **A**. However after more days it becomes **X** and this **X** is a complete stranger to material **A**.

On the same time the new information feed material **A** which becomes more mature and strong. The artist gains more insight into all material by practicing each day. He goes deeper in it and understands better the impact that each material is projecting outwards. This kind of improvisation is a practice that includes all aspects of performance. Apart from being a machinery of producing material the artist practices performance as well. That is because this kind of material is not only a physical practice but also a practice of how to consciously exhibit movement in order to communicate through it. In this sense each rehearsal is also a performance or at least it tries to be one. DANCE is a personal practice that tries to include everyone and everything.

"The practice is like the conscious heartbeat of the dance"

Deborah Hay, "my body the buddhist"

The process of the trio

It is the contents of movements, described previously, that made me curious into working with more people and their own 'contents'. I believe that each individual, by bringing in the studio his own amalgam of personal history, will produce through the process a personal and versatile vocabulary from where 'Phenomena' will depart.

During the first stage of the process I am planning to apply with both dancers and myself anew the same practice which I went through during the prequel research; with my guiding and the help of exercises which I invented we will gradually explore 'personal movement'. I'm firstly curious in observing and slowly defining what is the spectrum, of what each of us, perceives as contemporary dance. All big and small differences of approaches to movement but also to the stage in general; the way each performer projects herself through presence and the ongoing ideas that each one has about how to be on stage. In this process I am interested in using not only the core of the dances but also the periphery/marginal of their personal spheres of what they perceive as contemporary dance. This phase will bring diversity into the pool of material that will be produced.

In one of the exercises, 'Observing while dancing', the dancer should literally do that. It starts by the dancer throwing himself, by a first intuitive impulse and according to the needs of his body, into dance. When it is difficult to define the needs of the body, music of any kind can be also used in order to trigger these first impulses. Once the patterns and the internal logic of this dance start stabilizing, the dancer should actively observe and think what kind of movements he performs and why. Where could these movements possibly originate from? Through this improvisational exercise the dancer primarily traces and judges her choices. She therefore discards or keeps the elements she wishes to keep so her dance becomes a more conscious act. Moreover the dancer observes the quality of her movements and discovers areas where she could focus more and further refine her dance towards her own subjective ideal. It is an exercise for self-awareness and self-control while dancing. With the use of similar exercises ('Dance on nothing', 'Begin standing-facing the wall', 'Why does my body chooses symmetry', 'One thing at a time', 'Embraceableyours', 'Troposphere', 'Schaar duet' 'Units', 'Episodes', 'Walk', 'Help-dance', 'P.M.O.D.A', 'Scales'...) where one observes his dancing patterns and the systems of choice that he applies while dancing, or by watching recordings of himself, each dancer will start isolating the elements that comprise her dance.

The next step is to define and articulate these elements in order to create tasks. Tasks which have been already articulated in paper, video and in one's body, become the vehicle for 'premeditated kinetic improvisation'. Because once a task is defined one can go back to it knowing that it will always produce the same

effect but with small unexpected surprises each time within it. This method of dancing is eventually what makes the dance a 'live' medium. Small dances and material will be presented to each other in the form of presentations in order to see from early enough the potentials of each performer's performing qualities, materials and foresee the possible interconnections between all of us in order to trigger the choreographic structure.

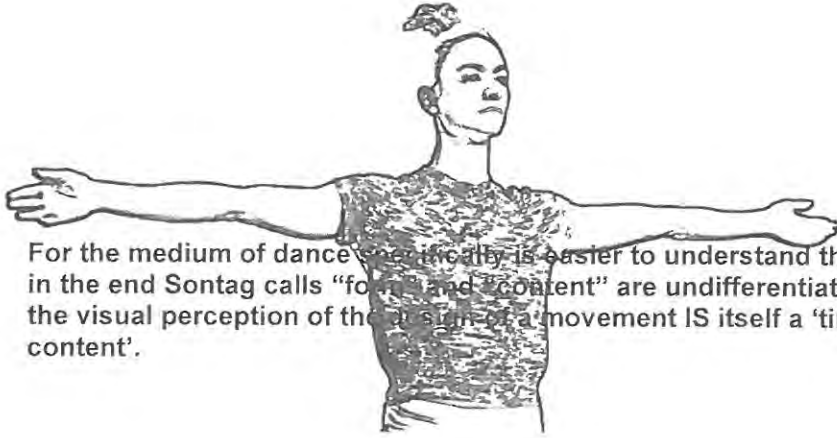
Once these materials are acquired the composition will be set in motion. Material will be put next to, on top, behind other material according to their properties and the impact they create. Both conflictual and harmonious but also less defined relationships will be sought between the three. The idea is that each performer will have 2 lines of choreography to follow. One would be his own one, as if it was a solo; a sequence of different material which will both reveal the individuality and the 'stage character' of this person and on the same time will narrate a sort of continuous line of thought and reasoning through his choices, dance and actions. The other line will be the macro, the choreography itself, the trio. The macro comprises of these three individual lines meeting in different constellations, timings, durations and spaces which will be creating solid scenes within the choreography; Different people soloing while a more static duet takes place. Or a very vivid duet while the third might be pushing the wall of the theater, three simultaneous solos, trios, etc..The constellations are too be defined during the rehearsals by performing material simultaneously or in a very confined spacing.

Each character will therefore convey through his presence his own logic and will be constructing through his personal 'storyline' in the piece, a slightly different meaning and interpretation of this trio situation. The interactions in-between will present three performers on stage seeking, as in existential philosophy, each one a slightly or greatly different meaning about their presence within this piece on stage. Each personal action or interaction will be bringing the viewer a step further in the macro 'storyline' and the conception of the whole piece.

About the 'storylines': I do not see these storylines as an imposed context on top of the process nor as an external story representing real life. I intend to create storylines (both micro and macro) according to the suggestive properties of each performer's material and their interconnections and allowing these materials to be more or less concrete. I do call it a story line though because I will intent to use all content that will appear from the materials into something that has the attributes of a story. Something who's reading will be clear, fluent and at times unpredictable with a pinch of nebulous situations and enigmatic twists. But whose overall structure would be difficult to summarize and describe. This doesn't mean though that I intend to avoid any reference to real life if that is embedded within the nature of the material.

"The fact is, all Western consciousness of and reflection upon art have remained within the confines staked out by the Greek theory of art as mimesis or representation. It is through this theory that art as such-above and beyond given works of art-becomes problematic, in need of defense. And it is the defense of art which gives birth to the odd vision by which something we have learned to call "form" is separated off from something we have learned to call "content", and to the well-intentioned move which makes content essential and form accessory."

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation",



For the medium of dance specifically is easier to understand that what in the end Sontag calls "form" and "content" are undifferentiated since the visual perception of the sign of a movement IS itself a 'tiny content'.



MDT

MDT is an international co-production platform and a leading venue for contemporary choreography and performance in Stockholm. MDT was founded in 1986 and has ever since presented Swedish and international emerging artists. MDT is supported by Kulturförvaltningen Stockholm stad, Kulturrådet and Kulturförvaltningen Stockholms läns landsting.

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