

LUDWIG

DANCE

DANCE TO

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MDT program texts

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DANCE TO DANCE TO - INTERVIEW WITH LUDVIG DAAE
BY RITA NATÁLIO FROM [DNA] DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS.

"WHAT IF BALLET WOULD LOOK DIFFERENT? WHAT IF WE HAD A DIFFERENT IDEA OF WHAT HIGH CULTURE IS WHEN IT COMES TO MOVEMENTS? WHAT IF WE CHANGE THE SOCIAL DANCE THAT WAS HISTORICALLY NAMED BALLET?"

RITA NATÁLIO: How would you present "Dance to dance to" in 2 or 3 lines?

LUDVIG DAAE: In previous works, such as HYPERFRUIT, where I collaborated with filmmaker Joanna Nordahl, we worked a lot with verbal communication, video, songs, and some dance. Dance was a tool, among others, to communicate specific things, as I always departed from specific images or a theoretical research. This time, in "Dance to dance to", I decided to come back to dance and composition as a central aspect of the work. I am off stage for the first time and I have initiated the process of creation with a physical research in mind.

RITA NATÁLIO: In "Dance to dance to" you try to operate a ballet translation to pop culture. How is this possible?

LUDVIG DAAE: Well, a lot of my work comes from popular culture. Some people see some of these procedures as a way of bringing an ugly aesthetics to stage as a way to merge pop culture with high culture (which is how contemporary dance is considered). But, in 2017, I think we should be done with that, everything should be leveled and all kinds of aesthetics should have a place in the art, without considering this difference between low and high culture. For me, Beyonce or Justin Bieber can be sources of inspiration and I don't see their appearance in my pieces as strange or "edgy" elements, not more than any reference to fine arts.

In "Dance to dance to", I try to focus on this subject by looking to specific dance movements. For instance, in my case, where ballet is part of my background and a personification of the fine arts. We all know its origin is linked to nobility. In a way, ballet was very "posh" to its time, stories about princes and princesses were told to a powerful white audience in big opera houses. So naturally, ballet doesn't talk to everybody and a lot of people feel excluded from the ballet world. So I tried to research how ballet movements themselves, and not just ballet's surroundings, context and history could bring (or not) this sense of exclusion and elitism. I perceived how random these specific movements are to power contexts. Specific movements have become ballet and when you see these movements, you associated them with high culture. But the origin of these specific movements is arbitrary, so my thought was: what if ballet would look different? What if we had a different idea of what high culture is when it comes to movements? What if we change the social dance that was historically named ballet?

RITA NATÁLIO: So in a way you are "recoding" movements. But how do you see the contexts of power that surround certain dances, like ballet and hip-hop, and that produce a specific understanding of each dance tradition? How is power working in your work?

LUDVIG DAAE: In the process of research, I have looked to specific Swedish and Norwegian folk dances, but as I don't know these dances in depth, I couldn't really

detach them from a very general image of folk dance. Also, I felt stuck to a boring definition of gender and color. Then, I arrived to disco dance, which is a social dance that plays with androgyny and gender. Of course, by working with this technique I had to face power issues linked to the cultural appropriation of this specific context. Disco dance is not detachable from the context of dance clubs, drugs or parties. First, I had to be careful how to present a re-reading of dance history where, supposedly, disco dance had become ballet. Second, I wanted to create a piece which is not didactic or linear, I mean, to tell a linear story about how noble people in the Renaissance were dancing disco and then dance became other things, etc. That is why the idea of a "remake" came to light: the idea to introduce a fictional character (a Mexican choreographer called Esmeralda Vasquez) from where I could operate this change in history. With this fictional character we could establish a coherent dialogue with Esmeralda's supposed original and traditional movements from the 18th century, without having to tell all dance history from A to Z. And, after all, it is really nice to share the spotlight with someone who is not male or white or European, so in a way I am happy to introduce a feminist point of view of dance history. Finally, but still regarding the question of power, I also try to reflect on power at a micro-level, specially in the relations between everyone in the team. I really don't want to occupy a place in the top of the pyramid. I prefer to be a facilitator rather than a dictator and I want everybody to participate at a same level.

RITA NATÁLIO: Yes, and maybe this is linked to my feeling of a certain automation in "Dance to dance to" as if dances were build upon a collective imaginary and not produced by a singular gesture of one author. As if dances develop by themselves. Do you recognize this in your work?

LUDVIG DAAE: Yes, because I am very sick of the idea of the author as a genius. I work much better with a group in a more horizontal way, when people don't have to fit what I want as an author. But this "automated" quality is also something I wanted to try out since the beginning of the process. If ballet is re-written in "Dance to dance to", I prefer to step out of my personal beliefs of what makes a "good piece" in a traditional way. I decided to avoid compositional maneuvers and tools such as contrast and dramaturgical curves, which is a heritage from classical dance and theater. I tried to put myself in the shoes of a disco dancer, and to imagine a piece according to that. To work with the on-going situation of dancing in a club, with its social status. So, I decided that in "Dance to dance to" the music should just start, be ongoing and the piece should be non-stop.

RITA NATÁLIO: This automated quality can also be read in the context of your work with the internet, which is also the case in HYPERFRUIT. I feel there is an intrusion of the internet in your vision as a choreographer, as if internet and image-based culture could alter dance history and dance ethics. What do you think about this? How do you place yourself as a choreographer in the Age of Internet and hyper pop culture?

LUDVIG DAAE: I am obsessed with the internet and everything about it. But I don't see internet as something that is a fashion or a subject of work. It's just life. It's reality, as air or love is. In this sense, I am not interested in "representing" internet. I am interested in how it affects our communication, which is not separate from how we perceive stage art today. Live art, dramaturgical curves, the building of

characters, the building of a plot or dilemmas are glued to a way of producing performing arts that are not relevant or real to me anymore. It's not how we live our lives anymore. So I think we need to change how we deal with dramaturgy and communication on stage. We don't have to mirror society but we need to recognize that society changes. We don't have to make "an internet piece" but also we don't have to stick to traditional dramaturgy.

In this sense, "Dance to dance to", as well as HYPERFRUIT or "Fun, Laughs, Good Time", tries to escape the idea that I have to conduce a piece according to what I like, according to my own taste. I work with structures that allow me to escape the forms I was educated to like and to produce in my ballet education or at PARTS. I mean, I try to force myself to escape the idea of producing a "good piece". If I want the audience to have an experience I prefer to propose something I am not in control of.

[DNA] DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS is a collaboration between 13 European institutions who are active in the field of contemporary dance. This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Partners: ALKANTARA, CDC TOULOUSE, HAU, HELLENIC FESTIVAL, NEW THEATER INSTITUTE OF LATVIA, MDT, PACT ZOLLVEREIN, PARTS, SPRING, STATION, TRAFÔ, VOORUIT, ZODIAK

There are 20 written movements in Dance to Dance to, based on our interpretation of the movements in Esmeralda Vazquez' original "Dance to dance to". We made new dances by following these definitions as instructions as well of doing the opposite of the definitions. That way we ended up with several dances, both so called "positive" and "negative" variations on the original dance material. Examples:

POSTIVE MOVEMENTS

1

Bend and stretch
Bouncy quality
Angle in arms
On the music
Flat/two dimensional
Held shape
Stationary

2

On the music
Shift the weight
Back and forth
Upper body reacts

3

On the music
Shift weight
Spiral
Back and forth
Upper body reacts
+ development of nr 2

4

Loop of 4
Accent on 3
Travel in a square
Repetition

5

Repetition
Shift weight
Slide'y
Right, left
Opposition
Stationary

6

Travel
Specific trajectory back and forth
Accent on 4 and 8

7

Circular movement
Bend and stretch
Shift weight between feet
Trajectory back and forth

8

Development of nr 6
+ turn around yourself
+ new direction

9

Syncopation
Right, left
Repetition
Clear trajectory
Symmetry

10

Show clear directions
Diagonal
In and out from the body
Stationary
Right, left + "3"

NEGATIVE MOVEMENTS

11

Not your own version of “kick ball change”

12

Do not lift from the floor

No shape of 8

Do not travel a lot

No repetition

13

No syncope

Do not lift from the floor

Not stationary

No repetition

No clear, held shape

Arms and legs **do not** do similar movements

14

No wave

No sound

No “right, left”

Not stationary

15

No clear path

Not back and forth

Not around yourself

No circular movement in the upper body

No sound on 4 and 8

16

Not 4 clear directions

Not stationary

Not bouncy quality

17

Not stationary

Not bouncy

No double tempo

Not clear shape in the hands

18

Not stationary

Not frozen upper body

No movement in the legs

19

Do not show a clear direction

Not stationary

No pelvis

Not asymmetrical

Not a position that takes up space

+ **Do not** remove an element half way

20

No clear trajectory

No sound

No crossing of limbs

+ **not** a development of 19

+ **no** circular arms

All 20 movements were turned into positive and negative variations.



Still from the Atlanta Ballet's production of

Dance to Dance to in 2005



Fashion show based on Esmeralda Vasquez during Oslo Fashion week in 2009



Student work being presented at the Vasquez School for Dance in Mexico City.

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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