



Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le theatre, 2017

## Mårten Spångberg

**Mårten Spångberg** (b. 1968) is a choreographer living and working in Berlin and Stockholm. His interest concerns dance in an expanded field, something he has approached through experimental practice in a multiplicity of formats and expressions. He has been active on stage as a performer and creator since 1994, and since 1999 has been creating his own choreographies, from solos to larger scale works, which have toured internationally. Under the label International Festival, Spångberg collaborated with architect Tor Lindstrand and engaged in social and expanded choreography. From 1996-2005 he organised and curated festivals in Sweden and internationally, and in 2006 initiated the network organisation INPEX. He has considerable experience in teaching both theory and practice. From 2008-2012, he directed the MA programme in choreography at the University of Dance in Stockholm. In 2011, his first book, *Spangbergianism*, was published. His more recent works *La Substance*, but in English, *The Internet*, *Natten* and *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* has gained extensive international recognition. His work is currently devoted to relations between dance and ecology which has resulted in a series of works *Culture*, *The Climate*, *46* and *Anthropology*.

## Anthropology (2019)



Premiere at Explore Festival Bucharest 2019.

“Anthropology” is the second part of a series addressing relations between dance and ecology. The project researches alternative narratives concerning ecology and its relations to the body, understood as a possible intermediary between modalities of organising life. In what ways can dance function as a laboratory for how we can approach the world differently? Perhaps what is needed is not to regulate life as we know it but to labour for the possibilities of new forms of life. Not climate change but a change of the climate, climate being what all beings, creatures, animate and inanimate share and contribute to. It’s not a matter of commitment to save the world but instead a letting go of established dichotomies between for example nature and culture, work and leisure, intuition and science, human and non-human, subject and object. “Anthropology” proposes vague forms of being with, cohabitation and exchange that dissolve information and knowledge in favour of experience and wisdom. Instead of definition availability, instead of from here to there a landscape that expands with us.

The performance takes the form of an autonomous system, a living being, that the dancers need to generate relations to, to form ecologies that nourishes the system and still maintains its specificity. In this sense the performance will adapt to conditions, unfold differently each occasion and continue a process of care and awareness. Understanding the piece as an autonomous organism refers to forms of knowledge transfer taking place across species and different, incompatible epistemologies, a kind of leakage between realities that open up to new forms of ethics, alternative narratives and non-human geographies.



## The Climate (2019)



Premiere Stamsund Theatre Festival 2019

“The Climate” is the first part of a series addressing relations between dance and ecology. The project researches alternative narratives concerning ecology and its relations to the body, understood as a possible intermediary between modalities of organising life. In what ways can dance function as a laboratory for how we can approach the world differently? Perhaps what is needed is not to regulate life as we know it but to labour for the possibilities of new forms of life. Not climate change but a change of the climate, climate being what all beings, creatures, animate and inanimate share and contribute to. It’s not a matter of commitment to save the world but instead a letting go of established dichotomies between for example nature and culture, work and leisure, intuition and science, human and non-human, subject and object that together have in common to distance and compartmentalise the anthropocentric. Together with a group of five dancers these and other questions has been folded into practices that aim at shifting or even changing what determines the ecologies of dance, choreography and aesthetic experience - ecologies that contribute to the climate, and ultimately what it means to exist.

“The Climate” is a dance for you and a dancing together, a little bit of hope that things can be otherwise.

## Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre



Premiere Kunstenfestivaldesarts 2017

C'est peut être la raison pour laquelle Maria Hassabi pose dans son titre une question sur le théâtre ou que l'oeuvre de Mårten Spångberg a pour sous-titre une pièce pour le théâtre ; parce qu'au fond l'apparition du paysage sur scène ne modifie pas seulement les possibilités de la dramaturgie ou l'idée de paysage, mais elle nous met face à notre image, assis ensemble en train de construire la simplicité inexplicable du théâtre: une consécration collective de temps passé à la fenêtre.

Daniel Blanga-Gubbay



## Natten (2016)



Premiere Kunstfestivals de arts 2016

Again, making a long leap, I would associate Spångberg's choreographic gesture with the experience of the uncertainty of life we live now – in Europe at least – after the period of modernity and postmodernity where society and life attempted to be 'well tailored'. Today, in order to learn how to live – or even simply survive – we must get rid of that phantasm; we must endure contradictions and face the horrifying uncertainty of existence. Alone and together. I wouldn't say that I exaggerate (too much) when I claim that while attending *Natten* I experienced the historicity of the current moment. The moment happening on the verge of language. The moment that doesn't resemble European 1930s but 2030s. On that ground, speaking now from within the field of performing arts, I see *Natten* as a proposition for the choreography of the moment in which we live. A new proposition, which we experience as familiar because we live it every day, but for which we still lack words. And how indeed to find the words to inscribe *Natten* into history, yet let it bounce around? I don't know, but I nevertheless tried.

Ana Vujanovic

## The Internet (2016)



Premiere Gallery Supportico Lopez



It seems to me that in his performance Spångberg brought the vibe of the Internet into an analogue form. The incorporated objects are very haptic; the movements of the performers are strongly human and natural, even though I was silly enough to expect robot dances beforehand. The performance area is stuffed with a complex variety of symbols and motifs including labels and patterns, both characteristic for the web. Meanwhile the young females have come to sit down on the blanket with the word Unrendered printed on. They are now wearing stewardess uniforms, and each of them is carving with a knife on a piece of wood. It triggers a vision of girl scouts who build a wooden world (chain, anchor, rifles) inside this realm of colourful chaos. The sound of birds singing adds up to the image and for the first time the audio piece seems to support the visual aesthetics. This fantastic and very pretty scenario seems to me like a very literal image of the return to the analogue world.

Sarah Rosengarten/Kuba Paris



## La Substance but in English (2014)



Premiere MoMA PS1 New York

The political-philosophical unconscious of Spångberg's tour de force is this black power — it is an unconscious, however, that is not Spångberg's; it is an unconscious that does not belong to an author, nor to a subject, nor even to the subject of the "creative collective." The unconscious names the assembler and producer of all those affects already crisscrossing the undercommons of our existence, the movement of things independent from their masters and their encounters, and the "anachoreographic" (Harney and Moten 2013:50) collisions produced. Under the dome, under the glitter and shiny bottles of Listerine and Monster and Coke, the black (under)ground thuds its sounds, proposing a force no choreography can control. One may only unleash it and brace up for what it makes happen: dance's black matter, its dark physics, beyond emancipation.

André Lepecki

The attempts at creating landscape on stage partly come from deliberate experiments with democracy, while partly requiring a truly new epistemic of perceiving the space around us, be it mental, physical, emotional, political or social. The dramaturgical tactics of co-existence in that space as one of its elements largely emerge from probing that new, post-Anthropocene, so to speak, epistemic. They are uncertain. They promise new beginnings. We may best understand them as prefigurative artistic experiments for a time that is coming.

Ana Vujanovic on La Substance

## 46 (2019)



### Premiere Impulstanz

If abstract things can exist, such as a rumour, a jpeg stored on a hard drive, the Hindu goddess Parvati or the nothingness in a half empty bottle. What says that dance can not exist, generate some form of autonomy or simply a life of its own?

46 is an ongoing research into the autonomous existence of dance, expressed as a series of performances where dancing is a means of forming bonds with dance. To dance or be danced by a dance that has its own existence implies to grant dance agency. To approach or care for such a dance requires a new mind-set and opens for the possibility for altered forms of experience.

46 is presented in parks, nature or in semi-public spaces such as churches, museums and libraries.

Inspired by contemporary materialism, quantum-physics, emoji aesthetics, AI and urban-dance, 46 aims undermine dominant modes of composition and formations of representation, aiming at producing places for the possibility of shared practices to emerge.



## Digital Technology (2016)



“(…) Spångberg performance Digital Technology also has certain ritualistic connotations (...). It is a kind of quiet, performative ritual we are allowed to witness. At the beginning of the performance Spångberg tells us that he is interested in how objects relate to the world, for he thinks that maybe we can learn something from these we can learn from ourselves or each other. Spread out on the floor is a variety of things, 'that I like to spend time with' - a tower with oranges, two white sheets of paint standing next to two Coke bottles, a tennis racket, dried roses and Snickers chocolate bars - to mention some of them.

A melancholic piano song is looping in the background throughout the performance, and projected onto a wall is the video TEN SKIES, showing just ten different cloud formations in the sky.

Spångberg "dialogue" with the objects most often consists in changing the formation or appearance of them, as if he creates a volatile relationship that we are allowed to testify. Occasionally he sings quietly

with the pop songs that break the meditative loop of piano game. I find that the focus lies in the performative here-and-now moment, in creating something that has not been there before, as Spångberg even put it a few days earlier. In a meeting between artist and audience, artist and objects. It is only this which is the position's value and this value is measured individually by each spectator. The attitude among viewers seem relaxed - someone is lounging on the floor, others on Facebook. My thoughts go what Spångberg talked about the seminar: If art is free, you must also spectators to be seen as free individuals. It may seem as if Spångberg see a potential in this freedom: we choose what we experience in this meeting, and if we at all want to continue to be present.”

Hilde Elisabeth Bjørk

## Powered by Emotion (2003)



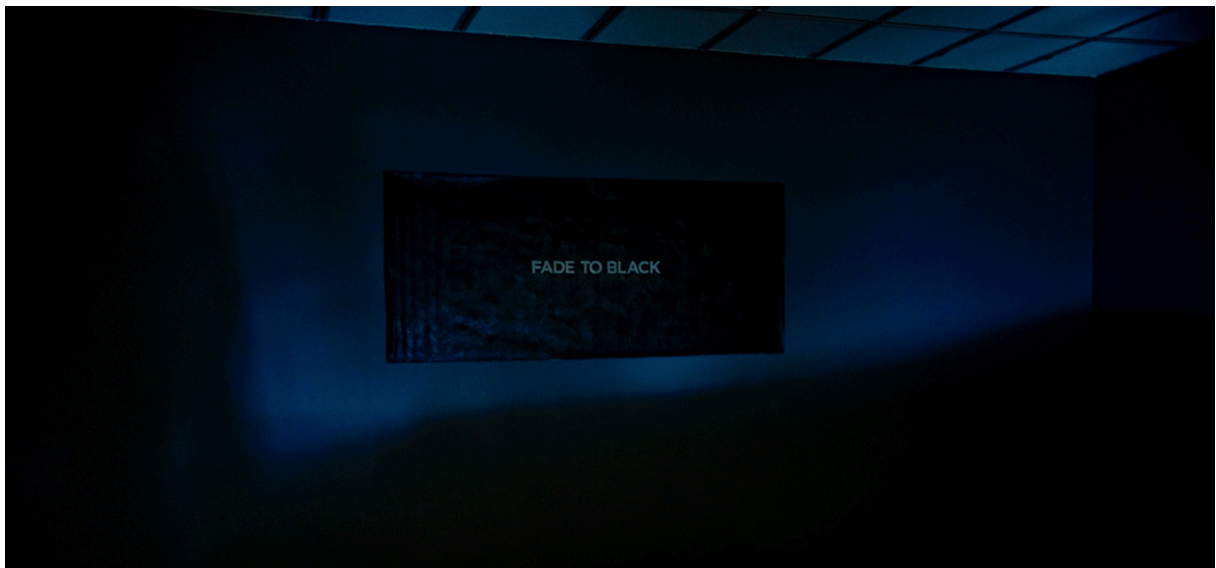
Premiere Tanz im August

And that is why the "dilettant" character of the Spångberg Variations on technology has meanwhile become a historical date, or in deleuzian terms a physiognomy of change within the profession: Instead of an aesthetical "enlightenment" politics, which illuminates emancipated subjects via conscious messages, the Spångberg Variations rather open the place of the former subject for "delighting" processes of variation. These processes pass through emotion, otherwise, how could I declare my delight? Yet, different from being just another refreshing commodity on the market of cultural industries, the "corporeal exercise of interpreting with diverse variations for body, voice and a black Coca-Cola T-Shirt" carefully unfolds a complex technology for theatrical machines, experiments with emotions and yet unknown subject matters. And since this technology asks for usage, it can only address to "dance, performance and other lovers" in order to be put into another - hopefully dilettante practice...

Petra Sabisch



## Natten (2018)



With his first solo exhibition in Norway, Mårten Spångberg opens up for a multidimensional experience exploring relations between darkness and aesthetic encounter. Starting from a series of short stories written in 2015 the exhibition brings forth a number of iterations based on the narratives in sound, video and painting superimposed, yet without becoming additive. The stories venture into the darker realms of human perception, a kind of existential horror where fear is not something, but manifests itself through nothing or even nothing's nothing. With a background in choreography Mårten Spångberg organises time's relation to space allowing temporalities, memories, pasts and futures to overlap and burst, creating a milieu that is simultaneously indifferent and intensively tangible. This is a space that withdraws from the world, transgressing boundaries of human experience and instead opening up for "a being with", an oscillation between knowledge and existence. The paintings shown in the exhibition have been labelled by Mårten Spångberg as smokescreen paintings in the sense that what is represented stands in for an image that is present only through its absence. Those images are not addressing absence but are concerned with forms of images that venture beyond human perception. In this respect Spångberg challenges, through sound, video and especially painting, modernist notions of essence in favour of potentiality and speculation.

## After The Exhibition (2017)



Hordaland Kunstsenter groupshow



Material Art Fair Mexico City



## Painting Today (2017)



Painting Today is an exhibition of new paintings by Mårten Spångberg and Sif Ankergård. Their paintings are as true as possible to the medium and suggest landscapes, psychoanalysis, absolute liquid, non-chromatic formalism and alien life. The whole thing was initiated by Anthea Buys.

## Natten (2017)



Tallinn Photography Biennale

## The Planet, late at night (2015)



Six Weeks in Time Henry Art Gallery Seattle



## Everything Under Heaven (2010)



Göteborgs Konsthall, solo exhibition 2010

## Mårten Spångberg Bio/CV

Mårten Spångberg is a Swedish performance related artist living and working in Berlin. His interests concern choreography in an expanded field, something that he has approached through experimental practices and creative processes in multiplicity of formats and expressions. He has been active on stage as performer and creator since 1994, and has since 1999 created his own choreographies from solos to large scale works which has toured internationally. The solo *Powered by Emotion* (2003) for himself has become a modern classic and has been shown in more than 20 countries.

A thorough focus on concept in pieces such as *"Avantgarde"* (1999), *"Recent Works"* (2000), *"All All..."* (2002) and *"Artists'-talk"* (2002), has later transformed into a stronger focus on the dancing body and the production of experience. Starting with *"Slowfall"* (2007) his interest as a choreographer has shifted towards a more detached form of performing and he has developed a unique practice that over the last few years has gained international reputation, especially since the 2014 production *"La Substance, but in English"*, commissioned by MoMA PS1.

*"The Internet"* (2015) for three performers investigated post-internet phenomena and developed further ideas around landscape dramaturgy. In 2016 *"Natten"* premiered at Kunstenfestivaldesarts – a seven hour long dance performance that took relations between experience and dance to a different level. *"La Nature IRL"* from 2017 was a performance that investigated form in order to generate an experience where the distance between audience and performance was diluted and where the understanding of dramaturgy and organisation was collapsed.

*"Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le theatre"* (2017) was the first piece where talking was introduced next to Spångberg's advanced highly complex choreographic language.

Since 2017 he has taken a particular interest in dance in relation to ecology and global warming. His last four productions take different perspectives on how dance can reflect and communicate the urgency of climate crises under the motto *"Climate Change or Change of Climate"*. *"Culture"* for two dancers and projections from 2018 is performed outdoors in parks at twilight and inquire relations between the dancing body and the assumed relation between nature and culture. 2019 he has created *"The Climate"* a work influenced by Emanuele Coccia's book *"The Life of Plants"* and the notion of breathing together. *"46"* is a solo for the choreographer danced in public space as an attempt to high-light dance relations to new materialism and the Anthropocene especially in respect of Karen Barad's critical theory around quantum physics. *"Anthropology"* also from 2019 is a mediation based on Timothy Morton's *"Dark Ecology"* and his understanding of weird loops.

His work in visual art has been exhibited in museums such as Hordaland Art Center (solo), Gothenburg Kunsthalle (solo), Neue Giessener Kunstverein (solo), Tate Liverpool, Tallinn Photography Biennale and Vitte De With. Since 2013 Spångberg has developed a relation to painting where choreography and object oriented ontology central. The body of work proposes a critique to studio practice and the fetishisation of creativity in particular to notions of post-humanism.

He has worked as a dancer and collaborator with among others Xavier Le Roy, Christine De Smedt/Les Ballets C de la B, Tino Sehgal and Jan Ritsema.

With the architect Tor Lindstrand he initiated International Festival, an interdisciplinary practice merging architecture and choreography/performance, thus understanding choreography as a means of organizing time and space. International Festival created contexts specific projects spanning from situations, to cinema, installations, public interventions and buildings.

In 2007 International Festival directed and produced their first full-length feature film *"On The Town"* commissioned by Performa '07. *SWEAT* the movie was produced in collaboration with ImpulsTanz Vienna summer 2008.

From 1996 Spångberg has organized and curated festivals in Sweden and internationally. Panacea Festivals Stockholm (96-05), BodyCurrency/Wiener Festwochen (98), CAPITALS Gulbenkian Foundation Lisbon (02-03), International Summer Academy Frankfurt (02/04) and later 2012 e.g. *"Choreography As Expanded Practice"* at Tàpies Foundation and MacBA.

He initiated the network organization INPEX in 2006, and has since supervised projects such as *The Swedish Dance History*, published in four issues spanning in total 5000 pages and 9000 copies, distributed world wide



2009 – 2012.

He has edited and published a number of books such as Post-dance, Agora, Movement Research.

As a writer he has published texts in numerous magazines and books. 1990 – 1997 he functioned as dance/performance reviewer for Dagens Nyheter, in Stockholm. In 2011 he published Spangbergianism and in 2016 Natten.

He has thorough experience in teaching both theory and practice among other places P.A.R.T.S, Ex.e.r.ce, ImpulsTanz, SNDO. Between 2008-2012 he was director for the MA program in choreography at the Univ. of Dance in Stockholm. He was guest professor at the institute for applied theatre studies at University Giessen, 2002, 2011 and 2017 and at Oslo National Academy of the Art 2017-2018.

### **Choreographic works**

- Anthropology, premiere Explore Festival 2019
- 46, premiere Impulstanz Festival, 2019
- The Climate, premiere Stamsund Theatre Festival 2019
- Culture, premiere Impulstanz Vienna 2018
- La Nature IRL, premiere Het Veem Amsterdam 2017
- Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre, premiere Kunstenfestival Brussels 2017
- Natten, premiere Kunstenfestival 2016
- The Planet, Late at Night, premiere Henry Art Gallery Seattle, 2016
- Digital Technology, premiere Gessnerallé Zurich, 2016
- The Planet, for Impulstanz, 2015
- The Internet, commissioned by Supportico Lopez Berlin, 2015
- The Nature FR, Santarcangelo Festival, 2014
- La Substance, but in English, commissioned by MoMA PS1, 2014
- The Ocean, Tokyo 2013
- The Nature Redux, Usine C Montreal, 2013
- The Nature, MDT Stockholm, 2013
- Jessica, PARTS, 2012
- The Beach, Impulstanz, 2012
- Epic, MDT Stockholm, 2012
- Burn Your Boats, with Kroot Juurak, Gothenburg Kunsthalle, 2010
- Ride The Wave Dude with Kroot Juurak, PAF, 2010
- DARK, Weld Stockholm, 2009
- Slowfall, TQW Vienna, 2008
- After Sade, TQW 2006
- Heja Sverige, MDT Stockholm, 2005
- Version Original Sous Titre, commissioned by P.A.R.T.S., 2004
- Powered by Emotion, Tanz Im August, 2003
- Artists' Talk, with Tor Lindstrand, Tanz Im August, 2002
- Break Intermission Before and After, commissioned by Frankfurt Ballet and William Foresythe, 2002
- All All Over Over All All, with Tor Lindstrand, Mousonturm Frankfurt, 2002
- Plosion, Mousonturm, 2001
- Recent Works, MDT, 2000
- Avantgarde, Tanz Im August, 1999

### **Solo Exhibitions**

- Late News From The Last International Hotshot, Hordaland Art Center, 2018
- The Kitchen Has No Flow, Neuer Giessener Kunstverein, 2016
- Everything Under Heaven..., Gothenburg Kunsthalle, 2010

### **Group Exhibitions**

- Perencuentro, Zona C Santiago di Compostella, 2019
- After The Exhibition, Hardaland Art Center, 2017
- Painting Today, Platform Stockholm, 2017 (duo)
- Tallinn Photography Biennale, 2017
- Six Weeks, In Time, Henry Art Gallery Seattle, 2016
- Melanchotopia, Witte de With, 2013

- If It's Half Broken, Center for Contemporary Art, Vilnius, 2011
- Move: Choreographing You, Haus der Kunst, München, 2011
- Dance and Choreography in The Arts since the 1960s, Korea National Gallery, Seoul, 2011
- Move: Choreographing You, Hayward Gallery, London, 2010
- Fifth Floor, Tate Liverpool, 2009
- Architecture Beyond Building, Venice Biennale for Architecture, 2008

### **Works with International Festival**

International Festival is a collaboration between Mårten Spångberg and the architect Tor Lindstrand initiated 2004, that research and produce in zones between choreography and architecture, the spatial and temporal expanding the possibility for respective expressions on structural levels. International Festival is an open collaborative platform questioning notions of authorship, ownership, modes of distribution and the economies of the circulation of art and its producers.

- Sing This At Home (See What Happens), commissioned by Elaine Levy Gallery, Brussels, 2009
- Start Me Up, commissioned by P. Görschlüter, in the frame of the exhibition "5th Floor, Activating Space", Tate Liverpool, 2008
- I Promise It's Gonna Be Fine, Elaine Levy Projects, Brussels, 2008
- Everything Turns To Gold, Swedish Day of Architecture, Stockholm, 2008
- It's Only Rock n' Roll (But I like It), Venice Biennale for Architecture, Venice, 2008
- SWEAT The Movie, full-length feature film telling the story of twelve young choreographers, commissioned by Impulstanz, Wien, 2008
- Sherlock Holmes and His Friends, Gallery A Brändström, Stockholm, 2008
- CAPITALISM: All or Nothing, commissioned by E. Gadolfo, Netherlands Architect Institute, Rotterdam, 2008
- CAPITALISM: Bring It On Again!, commissioned by VOLTA 08, New York, 2008
- International Festival: Son Of Man, installation, Fruit and Flower Deli, New York, 2007
- International Festival: On The Town, commissioned by Rose Lee Goldberg Performa 07, New York, 2007
- The Theatre, commissioned by Steirischer Herbst, 2007
- my Market, commissioned by Dorothea von Hantelmann, House of World Culture Berlin, 2007
- CAPITALISM: All Or Nothing, Art Cologne, commissioned by European Kunsthalle, 2007
- CAPITALISM: Bring It On!, commissioned by European Kunsthalle Cologne, 2007
- The Kitchen, commissioned by Dorothea van Hantelmann, my House at House of World Culture, Berlin, 2006

### **Films/Video**

- It Happened The Day Before Tomorrow, 2003 (4.33)
- The Corridore, 2005 (8.45)
- Comrades, 2006 (13.20)
- International Festival: On The Town, 2007 (98.29)
- SWEAT The Movie, 2008 (94.30)

### **Publications, Editor**

- Movement Research, 2018
- Post-dance, 2017
- Natten, 2016
- The Swedish Dance History, 2009-2012 (four volumes)
- Spangbergianism, 2011 (in Spanish 2018)
- Everything Turns To Gold, International Festival, 2008
- Sherlock Holmes and His Friends, International Festival, 2008
- The Theatre, International Festival, Steirischer Herbst, 2007
- CAPITALISM, Bring It On, International Festival, European Kunsthalle, 2007
- Why Book Now, P.A.R.T.S. Brussels, 2006
- Academy, Learning From The Museum, Van Abbe Museum, 2006
- The Adventure, Impulstanz, 2006
- Sex and The City, International Festival, 2006



- Jeff Wall, Tensta Konsthall 2, International Festival, 2005
- Reversed Engineering, Education in performance, B-books, with U. Melzig, 2005
- Derrida: Theatre of Cruelty and The Closure of Representation, Extra Clear Power, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, 2003
- Aristotle's Poetic, Extra Clear Power, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, 2003
- CAPITALS, Gulbenkian Foundation, with M. de Assis, 2003
- International Summer Academy Frankfurt 2002, with F. Malzacher, 2002

### **Teaching experiences**

- Program for Choreography, Univ. College of Dance Stockholm, director, 2008-2012
- Centre Choreographique Montpellier, Ex.c.er.ce, workshop lecturer choreography/creation, 2007 – 2008
- P.A.R.T.S. senior lecturer dramaturgy, 2001 – 2016
- Inst. for applied theatre studies Univ. of Giessen, Guest professor, 2000, 2011, 2017
- SNDO, 2014-2017

### **Curtatorial Experiences - Festivals and Events**

- PAF Spring Meetings, 2009 - 2015
- Choreography as Extended Practice, Barcelona, 2012
- Panacea 2005, Dansens Hus, Stockholm, 2005
- V International Summer Academy Mousonturm, with F. Malzacher, 2004
- Panacea 2004, Moderna Dansteatern, Stockholm, 2004
- CAPITALS, Dance/Theatre Season and Festival, Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, 2002 and 2003
- IV International Summer Academy Mousonsturm, with C. Peters, Frankfurt, 2002
- Panacea: I Never Let You Go, with Siemens Kulturprogramm, Stockholm, 2001
- Panacea 1999, Kulturhuset Stockholm, 1999
- Body Currency, Wiener Festwochen, with Hortensia Völkers, 1998
- Panacea 1998, Stockholm Cultural Capital 1998
- Uthärda, Performance Festival, Kulturhuset Stockholm, 1996

### **Co-choreographer**

- 9x9, full-length choreography for 81 amateur performers created in collaboration with Christine De Smedt, 17 different versions created between 2000-2005, Les Ballets C de la B, Gent, 2000-2005
- Performer and collaborator with: Xavier Le Roy (97-08), Christine de Smedt/Les Ballets C de la B (99-04), Tom Plischke (00), Lynda Gaudreau (05), Tino Sehgal (99-07)
- Dramaturgy: Ina Christel Johannesen (96), Ingun Björnsgaard (98), Angela Guerrero (97-98), Dennis O'Connor (99), Tim Feldman (99), Christine de Smedt/Les Ballets C de la B (99-04), Mette Edvardsen (03)

### **Studies**

- Academic studies in musicology, theatre/dance science, aesthetics and science of research. Since September 2008 PhD student shared by Univ. College of Dance Stockholm and Royal Inst. of Technology dept. for architecture.
- Music studies at Framnäs Folkhögskola (clarinet), 1985-1987
- Research assistant for Prof. Karin Harms-Ringdahl, Inst. for Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine, Karolinska Institute, 1992-1996

### **Writing**

- Dance and performance critic/writer for daily newspapers 2002 – 2007 (Aftonblandet and Dagens Nyheter), numerous essays and accidental texts in magazines, catalogues and books such as: Ballet International, ETC, Maska, Fraksija, Janus, Walking Theory, Performance Research, Art Press, Danstidningen, Visslingar och Rop, Site, A Prior, Dokumenta etc.
- Published in: Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, German, English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, Korean.

**Mårten Spångberg**

**Press 2014 – 2018**

**(selection)**





Daniel Blanga-Gubbay

## UNE IDÉE DE PAYSAGE - QUATRE VUES PERFORMATIVES

Intramuros issue 73, 2017

**Arrivée à un certain âge, Gertrude Stein s'aperçut qu'elle était devenue indifférente au théâtre, et indifférente à l'idée même de personnage. Le sentiment d'être obligée de faire connaissance avec le personnage, de sympathiser avec lui, en quelque sorte de s'en faire un ami, n'it par l'ennuyer. En raison de quoi Gertrude Stein préféra le paysage pour son être là, passif, qui ne demande rien jusqu'à ce qu'on y entre.**

**Mårten Spångberg** fait appel à cette histoire dans la présentation écrite de *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre*, une des œuvres présentées au Kunstenfestivaldesarts 2017. C'est à partir de cette référence et à travers quatre projets révélés au cours du festival que nous proposons de nous introduire dans l'espace même d'une réflexion sur le paysage - et de son rapport à la performance. Ces quatre opus composent une galerie dans laquelle s'arrêter devant autant de "vues" pour explorer les rencontres possibles entre le paysage et la performance ou, au contraire, y cheminer et tisser à travers elles un seul paysage en mouvement, à l'intérieur duquel se perdre et se ressaisir, peut-être, de notre rapport au paysage et au théâtre.

### 1. Une naissance du paysage

Le paysage n'est pas le territoire mais cette portion du territoire où se perd l'œil humain. Le paysage est



tout autre chose que la nature, c'est un pan de la nature telle qu'elle est vue par l'observateur; il émerge dans l'espace entre la nature et la vue. Précisément parce que transformation de la nature en image, le concept même de paysage est lié à la médiation de l'art, à la possibilité d'un premier passage de *pays* à *paysage*.

Bien qu'il existât déjà ailleurs comme genre, en Europe, le paysage naît dans les arrières-plans du XIV<sup>ème</sup> siècle, pour advenir lentement au premier plan comme sujet autonome. Il revient à Joachim Patinier de compter parmi les premiers à peindre le paysage comme sujet, vaste scène de cette passivité où se perdre. Le paysage semble ainsi s'affirmer comme genre à part entière, éloigné du registre de la présence humaine: comment donc le paysage est-il alors possible dans la performance?

Nous sommes devant la première vue: *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre*. La scène du KVS est recouverte de peaux de bovins et dotée d'une table basse, vague évocation d'un hall d'hôtel, où le passage et l'attente constituent les principales actions. Peu à peu les danseurs entrent, sortent et occupent l'espace de manière irrégulière; ils exécutent de courtes phrases chorégraphiques, ou attendent, assis en petites formations; ils sortent et reparaissent dans une nouvelle composition, comme dans une logique kaléidoscopique où se perdre dans les variations infinies du même matériel.

De temps à autre, ils s'ouvrent à de courts dialogues qui se réfèrent à des relations particulières, des échanges intimes, qui semblent laisser émerger un instant la promesse d'une narration. Cependant, en un rien de temps, le même dialogue revient, identique mais prononcé par d'autres. Il peut arriver qu'on y reconnaisse des fragments de films hollywoodiens: ils semblent constituer la seule possibilité de dialogue, comme si nous étions emprisonnés dans une relation désormais modelée par le spectacle, où même les relations les plus intimes n'ont d'autre possibilité que d'observer un code donné. Notre tentative première et spontanée de faire émerger des biographies et des liens s'évanouit lentement devant la transformation du texte en matière, qui circule – comme simple



marchandise – entre différents corps, négligeant la promesse narrative et écartant toute possibilité de faire émerger des personnages. En tant que spectateurs, nous assistons à la perte de leur privilège de pouvoir s'affirmer comme individus, un aspect que Spångberg a souvent souligné dans son intérêt pour la danse, cette potentialité – par rapport à d'autres formes scéniques – de pouvoir se dispenser de l'affirmation du sujet.

Et cependant, nous ne sommes pas simplement devant la renonciation du personnage; ici, la renonciation suit la dichotomie de Stein, et transporte les corps dans la possibilité d'un glissement du personnage au paysage. Spångberg travaille dans l'écart entre personnage et corps, nous rappelant que la disparition du personnage ne correspond pas à la disparition du corps.

Au contraire, nous nous trouvons face à un paysage de corps qui, dans leurs mouvements, en constituent l'élément central. Nous sommes devant une chorégraphie qui décline à l'infini ses possibilités, comme une branche qui, lentement, oscille au vent. La répétition de la voix même sonne alors différemment : comme si nous entendions l'écho d'un dialogue survenu ailleurs et encastré maintenant dans le paysage présent.

/.../

### **Devant le paysage**

Sortons du festival et de la galerie de paysages qui, dans leur diversité, se sont additionnés pour dessiner d'un paysage unique au fil des lignes de ce texte, comme les fragments éparses recomposés par Annik Leroy ont fait émerger un paysage imaginaire. D'un projet à l'autre, nous voyons surgir un paysage qui vibre en une mutation constante du géologique à l'animal, de l'humain au végétal et dans une absence de hiérarchie qui exclut toute possibilité de domination. Le paysage de cette réflexion nous rappelle que nous sommes en son sein, et cette découverte d'en faire partie fait émerger une ultime question. Si dans l'idée de paysage, l'homme moderne avait condensé son rapport ambivalent à la nature, tendu entre ses tentations de domination et son absolue fascination, dans quelle mesure sommes-nous objet de cette fascination?

En élargissant de nouveau notre champ de vision, nous croisons le regard des autres spectateurs,



faisant comme nous partie du paysage. Que ce soit dans le dispositif de *Gerhard Richter* ou de *STAGED?*, nous ne sommes pas seulement spectateurs du paysage mais aussi de la fascination qu'il exerce sur autrui: nous voyons les autres spectateurs regarder. Ce paysage contient l'image d'un temps passé ensemble devant lui, et nous fait soudain percevoir à nos côtés des centaines de regard qui oscillent en rythme décalé entre projection et pure contemplation. Ils nous rappellent que l'acte de regarder ne crée pas le paysage mais en fait partie. Ils nous rappellent que regarder le paysage n'est pas seulement découverte de sa splendide indifférence et d'une double temporalité, mais un moment de suspension délibérée de notre vie, les yeux plongés dans la possibilité de nous perdre ailleurs. Et c'est en cela que l'émergence du paysage au théâtre nous parle soudain du théâtre; de la particularité non évidente de l'expérience que nous sommes en train de vivre - ou que nous vivons chaque fois - en tant que spectateurs.

C'est peut être la raison pour laquelle Maria Hassabi pose dans son titre une question sur le théâtre ou que l'œuvre de Mårten Spångberg a pour sous-titre *une pièce pour le théâtre* ; parce qu'au fond l'apparition du paysage sur scène ne modifie pas seulement les possibilités de la dramaturgie ou l'idée de paysage, mais elle nous met face à notre image, assis ensemble en train de construire la simplicité inexplicable du théâtre: une consécration collective de temps passé à la fenêtre.

## Over *Gerhard Richter* van Mårten Spångberg

Titels. Altijd moeilijk. Choreograaf Mårten Spångberg gebruikte de naam van de beroemdste levende schilder als titel voor een langzame, raadselachtige dansvoorstelling, die in première ging tijdens het voorbije Kunstenfestivaldesarts.

Maar wat heeft *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* eigenlijk te maken met Gerhard Richter of zijn oeuvre? Op het eerste gezicht zo goed als niks.

Door Sébastien Hendrickx

(A)



Titels werken vaak als vlaggen die hun ladingen zo goed mogelijk proberen te dekken, maar misschien zijn de spannendste exemplaren wel die die buiten het directe bereik van een werk lijken te liggen en het van daaruit in een verrassend perspectief kunnen plaatsen. Gerhard Richters faam stoelt op de inventiviteit waarmee hij al decennialang westerse schilderkunstige tradities omvormt tot kritische dispositieven die de contemporaine technologische beeldproductie helpen te bevragen. Het is niet ondenkbaar dat Mårten Spångberg enige affiniteit voelt met de onderzoekende aanpak van de Duitse schilder. Op zijn beurt verhoudt hij zich via dans en choreografie tot een aantal ingrijpende techno-culturele ontwikkelingen van zijn tijd. Voorstellingen met expliciet oncreatieve titels als *The Internet* (2015) en *Digital Technology* (2016) gaan niet echt 'over' internet en digitalisering, maar zijn wel doordrongen van het besef van de impact die deze fenomenen hebben op onze tegenwoordige tijdsbeleving, zintuiglijke ervaring, ons kenvermogen en onze vormen van socialiteit.

### Landschap

Spångberg deelt daarnaast een diepe fascinatie voor het landschap met Richter. Als één van de klassieke picturale genres maakt landschapsschilderkunst onvermijdelijk deel uit van het oeuvre van die laatste. Veel van Richters doeken problematiseren, vernieuwen en verruimen ons begrip van het landschap. Voor de choreograaf vormt het dan weer een structurerend principe voor de dramaturgie van zijn voorstellingen. Net als heel wat andere podiumkunstenaars laat hij zich inspireren door het *landscape play* van de visionaire Amerikaanse schrijfster Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). Zij stelde vast dat de emoties, gedachten en waarnemingen van een theatertoeschouwer vaak achterophinken of vooruitlopen op het lineair-verhalende verloop van een geësceneerd toneelstuk. De kloof tussen drama en ervaring bracht haar tot de idee van een ruimtelijke dramaturgie die zich ontvouwt in de tijd, een dramaturgie opgevat als een toestand, een duur, eerder dan een min of meer causale keten van handelingen en uitwisselingen tussen personages. Het *landscape play* geeft misschien de indruk een nogal statische aangelegenheid te zijn, maar het verplaatst de dynamiek natuurlijk voor een groot stuk naar het standpunt van de toeschouwer, die zich mentaal door het landschap beweegt en zo een soort wandelaar wordt.

Spångberg is geen theatermaker, maar zijn dansvoorstellingen onderscheiden zich wel door de afwezigheid van een lineair-successieve structuur met een strakke spanningsboog. Doorgaans zijn het langzaam muterende omgevingen zonder duidelijke focus voor de toeschouwer; die kan er zijn blik en gedachten in laten ronddwalen. De choreograaf geeft de dans, de muziekscore, de omgang met kostumering en de stukken gesproken tekst die hij soms door zijn voorstellingen weeft, vorm als een continue mix van repetitie en variatie: binnen de herhalingen tekenen zich op den duur verschillen af, terwijl verandering soms een repetitieve kwaliteit krijgt. *La Substance, but in English* (2014) bood

“ Dat in de onontkoombare confrontatie met leegte en verveling geen gemakkelijke individuele vluchtwegen voorhanden zijn, zorgt voor een collectiever gedeelde ervaring: we zitten allemaal samen in hetzelfde schuitje. ”

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vier en een half uur zicht op een groepje jonge dansers die op een werktuiglijke manier absurde, felgekleurde rekwisieten behandelden, excentrieke kostuums aan- en uittrokken en eenvoudige dansfrases uitvoerden op de ritmes van eindeloos opgerekte pophits. Het geheel deed denken aan een doffe, gedegenereerde variant van de experimentele collectiviteiten uit de sixties. Hartstochtelijke betrokkenheid was er omgeslagen in een onverschillige, geïndividualiseerde deelname aan een ziellose consumptiecultuur.

In het werk van Spångberg beschikken de toeschouwers-wandelaars vaak over heel wat bewegingsvrijheid: ze zitten op kussens op de vloer, niet ver weg van de dansers, en kunnen op elk moment opstaan om rond te wandelen en de voorstelling vanuit verschillende hoeken te bekijken. Niets belet hen bovendien om buiten een luchtje te scheppen, iets te lezen, zich even in hun smartphone te verdiepen, een drankje te halen... Tijdens de zeven uur durende nachtchoreografie *NATTEN* (2016) kon het publiek zelfs slapen. De voorstelling greep door haar lengte, het nachtelijke uur, het schemerduistere lichtontwerp, de gracieuze traagheid en quasi-repetitiviteit van dans en muziek sterk in op de aandachtsstructuur van elke afzonderlijke toeschouwer. Hij of zij legde een individueel traject af waarin fases van concentratie, halfslaap, slaap, afleiding, verveling, volharding en immersie elkaar afwisselden.

### Theater

Ook *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* is opgebouwd als een monotoon performatief veld met continu verschuivende intensiteiten. De tweede helft van de titel wijst echter op een radicaal ander presentiekader. *Gerhard Richter* is een stuk voor het theater, en dus voor een setting met een bepaalde architectuur en gedragscode die specifieke manieren van kijken (on)mogelijk maakt. Met haar 2,5 uur is deze voorstelling beduidend korter dan haar voorgangers, maar het vaste gezichtspunt vanwaaruit je haar bekijkt plus de lichte sociale dwang die van de schouwburgzaal uitgaat – je kunt er niet zomaar ongezien vertrekken of gewoon even iets anders doen dan kijken – vergroten de impact van de duur en de quasi-repetitiviteit. Dat in de onontkoombare confrontatie met leegte en verveling





(naast momenten van schoonheid en ontroering!) geen gemakkelijke individuele vluchtwegen voorhanden zijn, zorgt voor een collectiever gedeelde ervaring: we zitten allemaal samen in hetzelfde schuitje. Al verlaat in de loop van de voorstelling toch minstens een derde van het publiek dat schuitje, hoogst geïrriteerd. Zelf ben ik getuige van een genereus, avontuurlijk kunstwerk, dat allerlei gevoelens en gedachten bij mij oproept rond verlies en rouw.

Maar Eerst nog even stilstaan bij dat theatrale kader. Tijdens *NATTEN* zaten de toeschouwers rondom de scène, dicht bij de performers, mee in de schemerzone. Het landschap *Gerhard Richter* blijkt heel wat afstandelijker, afgebakend als het is door de toneellijst en het podiumlicht. De scenografie, die zich dit keer als een klassiek theaterdecor frontaal naar een schouwburgpubliek richt, stelt een bijzonder groot uitgevallen woonkamer uit de jaren 1950 of 1960 voor, zo lijkt het. De tientallen koeienvellen op de vloer, het tafeltje met stapels keien als poten en een glasplaat als tafelblad, de minimalistische vazen en de twee gigantische bolvormige lampenkappen kleuren het geheel hoofdzakelijk in tinten bruin en beige, waar de fel gesatureerde kleurenkakofonie van de vele kostuumwissels scherp tegen afsteekt. Spångberg benadrukt het frontale karakter van zijn scènebeeld nog door voortdurend met de contrastwerking tussen voor- en

achtertoneel te spelen. De juxtapositie van verschillende constellaties dansers (solo's, duetten, trio's...) en materialen (dansfrases en gesproken dialogen) suggereert geen betekenishierarchie tussen voor- en achtergrond; het lijkt meer een manier om picturale diepte te creëren.

### Choreografie

Is *Gerhard Richter* naast een stuk voor het theater ook een *theaterstuk*? De vele gesproken tekstfragmenten zaaien aanvankelijk twijfel. Begeleidt het woord nu de dans of de dans het woord? Regelmatig houden twee van de tien dansers halt om met een trage, vlakke stem en een glazige staar in de ogen een korte dialoog op te zeggen. In totaal gaat het om een tiental passages, geplukt uit verschillende filmscripts, die in de loop van de voorstelling talrijke keren worden herhaald. Steeds opnieuw hoor je in dezelfde alledaagse, ongepolijste bewoordingen, inclusief de 'euh's' en de 'mmm's', spreken over ouderdom, de dood van een kind, gezondheidsproblemen, uitgedoofde relaties, gestrande ambities, de complicaties van het ouderschap en andere pijnlijke, al te menselijke onderwerpen. Geen wonder dat de choreograaf besloot om dit keer voornamelijk met oudere performers te werken, veertigers of vijftigers zoals hijzelf, kortom mensen met een wat hogere kans

op emotionele littekens. Uit de dialogen blijkt bovendien dat de personages tot gelijkaardige sociale kringen behoren als de ploeg achter *Gerhard Richter*, die van kunstenaars, intellectuelen, kosmopolieten. Fictie en werkelijkheid vermengen niet, maar liggen ook niet al te ver bij elkaar uit de buurt.

Als de danstheoreticus slash goeroe die hij ook is, voert Spångberg al jaren een gepassioneerd pleidooi om dans en choreografie niet eeuwig als een Siamese tweeling te blijven zien. Wanneer je de twee van elkaar durft los te koppelen, opent zich volgens hem een veld van onvermoede interdisciplinaire mogelijkheden. De abstracte, bewegingen-structurende capaciteit van de choreografie heeft altijd behoefte aan een concrete expressievorm om zichtbaar te worden. Choreografen kunnen zich daarvoor tot dans richten, maar evengoed tot algoritmes, video, schrijven, tekenen... In het geval van *Gerhard Richter* is de finaliteit nog steeds een voorstelling, maar naast dans, muziek, licht en kostumering maakt ook gesproken tekst deel uit van de ruwe materialen voor de choreografie. *Gerhard Richter* is dus geen theater maar een interdisciplinair podiumkunstwerk, gestructureerd door een choreograaf.

De dialogen draaien alle rond onverwerkt verlies. Bij een eerste luisterbeurt kunnen uitspraken als *'It's not easy to get older'*, *'I never wanted to be a mom'* of *'You didn't come to bed last night?'* nog resoneren met de persoonlijke bezorgdheden of kwetsuren van een individuele toeschouwer, al werpt de bevreemdende, afstandelijke zegging van bij het begin obstakels op voor een gemakkelijke emotionele identificatie. De choreografische behandeling van de teksten maakt ze op den duur echter nog onpersoonlijker en abstracter. De herhaling-plus-variatie (dezelfde passages worden nu eens door oudere, dan weer door jongere performers vertolkt, de mannenrollen af en toe door vrouwen en vice versa) koppelt de woorden los van de sprekers, net zoals eenzelfde dansfrase door verschillende dansers kan worden uitgevoerd. Gradueel verliezen de teksten hun betekenis; ze worden klanken, vage kleuren die steeds meer opgaan in het algehele choreografische landschap. Iets gelijkaardigs gebeurt met de muziekscore, die wat aan rustgevend-repetitieve muzak doet denken. Een stroom gitaargetokkel verdwijnt na een tijdje in de achtergrond van je ervaringsveld. Pas wanneer de muziek na een twintigtal minuten plotseling naar zachte electro schakelt, word je je opnieuw bewust van haar aanwezigheid.

### Rouw

De choreografie abstraheert de woorden niet alleen, ze vervlecht die ook met trage, sierlijke dansfrases. Nu eens zie je referenties aan ballet, dan weer denk je een fragment uit een populaire muziekvideoclip te herkennen. De dansers trekken in slow motion over het podium. Wanneer de muziek om de halve minuut of zo een tel lang stilvalt, bevriezen hun lichamen even in het midden van een beweging. Na zo'n micropauze valt de repetitieve soundtrack terug in de maat, en komen de dansers opnieuw tot leven met een knikje in de heupen,

“ De soevereine fysieke beheersing van de dansers contrasteert met de sarcastische humor, de bitterheid, het zuchten, de twijfelende toon... die in de dialogen doorklinken. ”

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een halve draai om hun as, en een stap weg van de plaats waar ze zich bevonden. De hele voorstelling lang weten ze blindelings de witte kopjes met opgedroogde koffie te ontwijken, die gecomponeerd willekeurig over de koeienvellenvloer liggen verspreid. Hun soevereine fysieke beheersing contrasteert met de sarcastische humor, de bitterheid, het zuchten, de twijfelende toon... die in de dialogen doorklinken, en die verraden dat het verleden van de personages nog dagelijks komt spoken en hen uit balans brengt.

Spångbergs voorstelling toont verschillende facetten van verlies, maar doet verder geen duidelijke uitspraken. Zoals elk goed kunstwerk is het een abstract-concreet semiotisch systeem dat het publiek geen lezing oplegt, maar bij ieder afzonderlijk lid ervan een rijkdom aan betekenissen en affecten kan genereren. Hoe je als toeschouwer-wandelaar door dit landschap navigeert is jouw zaak. De specificiteit van de choreografie en de materialen die zij met elkaar verweeft, zorgen er wel voor dat *Gerhard Richter* geen open kunstwerk is waarin je zomaar verloren loopt tussen allerlei willekeurig aandoende impressies en associaties. Zelf lees ik de voorstelling als een omarming van het rouwen.

Elk van ons moet ooit zien om te gaan met onvervulde dromen, de plotse dood van een naaste, het meer graduele verlies van een liefdesrelatie, van het eigen jeugdige lichaam of een deel van zijn of haar identiteit. Rouwarbeit wordt doorgaans louter met sterfgevallen in verband gebracht, maar eigenlijk vormt ze de nasleep van uiteenlopende soorten verlies. Vaak vinden verschillende rouwprocessen tegelijkertijd plaats, het ene nog wat verser en intenser dan het andere. We staan ermee op en gaan ermee slapen. Stuk voor stuk zijn het complexe, non-lineaire en verwarrende processen die ons fundamenteel kunnen veranderen, en waarschijnlijk deïnen we er daarom soms voor terug. Veel veiliger is het immers om vast te houden aan een statisch treuren. Van diegenen die de sprong niet wagen, zijn zij die zich met passie overgeven aan de ontkenning van het verlies, nog het meest zelfdestructief. Voor rouw is moed en durf nodig.

Door de combinatie van de lange duur van de voorstelling, de gestage abstrahering van de teksten rond verlies en de beheerste, gracieuze kwaliteit van de dans brengt *Gerhard Richter* een soort emotionele onthechting bij mij teweeg, een onverschilligheid die niet de fletse kleur van de apathie bezit, zoals in *La Substance*, maar iets hoopvol in zich draagt: verlies wordt hier gewaardeerd



(C)

als een belangrijk deel van het leven. Het korte, wat cryptische verhaal over Gerhard Richter dat Spångberg zelf ter verantwoording van zijn opmerkelijke titel aanhaalt in een tekst in de programmabrochure en een publiek nagesprek na de voorstelling, interpreteer ik nu met terugwerkende kracht in dat licht. Tijdens een interview vroeg Nicholas Serota, de directeur van het Britse Tate museum, ooit aan de Duitse schilder waarom hij op een bepaald ogenblik onscherpe figuratieve schilderijen begon te maken (vaak *blurry* kopieën van persfoto's). In plaats van een grondige kunsthistorische uiteenzetting bij zijn meest beroemde reeks gaf Richter het volgende antwoord: 'Wel, weet je. Op dat moment... was het mogelijk.' Met zijn ultrabeknpte reactie leek hij te wijzen op het contingente karakter van de ontwikkeling van zijn oeuvre. Ook een levensloop zou je als radicaal contingent kunnen omschrijven. Voor hoe veel dingen lopen, hoe ze ontstaan en verdwijnen, bestaat namelijk geen dwingende zin of reden, en je hebt ze nauwelijks in de hand. In grote mate zijn ze het product van context en toeval. Iets wordt plotseling mogelijk; betekenisvolle, waardevolle samenhangen tekenen zich af, en kunnen na verloop van tijd ook weer desintegreren. Een omarming van de radicale contingentie van het bestaan helpt bij het rouwen, en het zich opnieuw openstellen voor de mogelijkheden die zich blijven aandienen.

Anderhalf of bijna twee uur in de voorstelling merk je ineens dat je al een tijdje geen tekst meer hoorde. De constellaties van dansers en dansfrases worden geleidelijk aan ingewikkelder, op het randje van onsamenhangend soms. Steeds meer openbaart de choreografie haar transindividuele kwaliteit: ze begeeft zich in de complexe grijze zone tussen het gemeenschappelijke en het individuele. Zo slaat de vloekende pluriformiteit van de voortdurende kostuumwissels op een bepaald ogenblik even om in veelkleurige overeenstemming wanneer de kleren van de meeste performers bloemenmotieven dragen. Ook de dans heeft haar unisono-momenten wanneer

“ Spångbergs voorstelling toont verschillende facetten van verlies, maar doet verder geen duidelijke uitspraken. Hoe je als toeschouwer-wandelaar door dit landschap navigeert is jouw zaak. ”

eenzelfde gebaar plots door bijna alle dansers gelijktijdig wordt uitgevoerd. Aan het andere eind van het sociale spectrum tekent de korte, eenmalige solo van Mark Lorimer zich af als een singulier evenement in het landschap, fundamenteel anders dan alles wat we daarvoor en daarna zien. Verder tonen de spiegelingen, herhalingen en vertalingen van bewegingen vooral de interdependenties tussen het individuele en het collectieve. De transindividuele choreografie van *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* correspondeert zo met de bijzondere groepservaring die ze oproept in het donker van de theaterzaal, en die eerder aan het katholieke Allerzielen of het Mexicaanse *Día de los Muertos* doet denken dan aan een nationale rouwceremonie: ze suggereert een gemeenschappelijke context voor individuele rouw.

- (A) *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* © Anne Van Aerschot  
(B) *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* © Anne Van Aerschot  
(C) *Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre* © Mårten Spångberg

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# Der schwedische Dance-Maker

Angst vor Pina Bausch? Vorbei! Unesoterisch zeigt zeitgenössischer Tanz wieder Gefühle



Mårten Spångbergs neue Arbeit „Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre“, uraufgeführt in Brüssel  
Foto KOTJA

Frankfurter Allgemeine May 17

Es wird so viel gefühlt. Alles ist aufgeladen: In den Popcharts flirrt die Wärme von MDMA-Rap und Dancehall-Sounds, und in der bildenden Kunst gewinnt Anne Imhof mit ihrem viel zu coolen Verlorenheits-Faust den Goldenen Löwen bei der Venedig-Biennale. Es gibt ein neues künstlerisches Interesse am Affekt, also an den zeitgenössischen Infrastrukturen des Fühlens – an Body Shame, Hasskommentaren und queerem Begehren genau wie an den intensiven Impulsen, die zwischen Menschen herumschwirren, sogar noch bevor sie als Gefühl erkennbar werden.

Inmer wieder wird dabei Tanz als ein Instrument bemüht, um Affektivität mit Sprache, Politik und Sex zu verbinden. Pop setzt zum Beispiel auf den Beat von Riddim, und bildende Kunst entdeckt schicke Tanzmoves für den White Cube. Im zeitgenössischen Tanz selbst waren explizit affektive Praktiken eine Zeitlang verschmäht, zu groß war die Angst vor einem Rückfall in esoterischen Körperkitsch, die Angst vor den langen, roten Kleidern von Pina Bausch. Aber jetzt passiert etwas, vielleicht, und es ist kein Zurück, und es gibt auch kein Zurück.

Mårten Spångberg baut mit an einer Landschaft des Tanzes oder, wie er sagen würde, des Post-Dance, die ein neues Nachdenken über zeitgenössische Affektivität ermöglicht. Spångberg, geboren 1968 als Schwede, ist seit Jahrzehnten ein Fixstern der internationalen freien Tanzszene. Zunächst schreibend, dann als Performer, jetzt als Choreograph oder, wie er wiederum sagen würde, als Dance-Maker. In den neunziger Jahren dachte und machte er neben Jérôme Bel und Xavier Le Roy bei dem mit, was Conceptual Choreography gewesen sein sollte: gedachte Bewegung, bewegtes Denken – kompliziert, aber erfolgreich. Jetzt erweitert er den Choreographiebegriff in

eine andere Richtung, mit einer virtuoseren Form, in der sich Denken und Bewegung auf eine offene Beziehung einlassen.

„La Substance But in English“, eine vom MoMA PS1 in Auftrag gegebene jüngere Arbeit Spångbergs, ist eines dieser Stücke, die irgendwann, im Internet oder in Echt, alle gesehen haben. Hier wird über vier Stunden virtuos eine affektive Infrastruktur performt, in der ellenlange Variationen von Britney Spears’ „Toxic“-Choreographie und präpubertäre Youtube-Hits – Mentos-Cola-Light-Explosionen und Wackelpuddingmasken – eine Art Mandala bilden. Die Performer sind konzentriert, dabei ohne jede Ambition, und ihr Tanzen bleibt so minimal, dass es vor allem Raum schafft, einen Rahmen, in den sich das Publikum hineinsetzen, -gucken oder -legen kann. Dabei geht es nicht um schlaudumme Konsumkritik, sondern um die Frage, ob sich da in neuen Anordnungen der Gegenwart irgendetwas verbirgt.

„Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre“ heißt Spångbergs neue Arbeit, die beim Kunstenfestival in Brüssel gerade Premiere feierte. Hier verhält es sich genau umgekehrt. Fast alles ist knapp oder längst vorbei: Die falschen oder echten Kuhfelle, die im Schachbrettmuster den Tanzboden bilden. Die Hawaii-hemden, die ihr ironisches Comeback längst gehabt haben und jetzt leer und blumig an den Tänzerinnen und Tänzern hängen. Die Tänzerinnen, die alle älter und eigener sind, als der Mainstream im zeitgenössischen Tanz es gerne hätte. Dass alles vorbei ist, sagen sie, wenn sie nicht tanzen und dann auf dem Boden sitzen, sich direkt ins Gesicht: „Are you sick?“ – „Yes I’m sick“ – „Are you dying?“ Es sind zugekitschte Hollywood-Dialoge, so lange wiederholt, aus- und durchgesprochen, bis man ohne Ironie sagen kann: sie treffen mitten ins Herz.



Mit dem Malerstar gleichen Namens hat Gerhard Richter, bis auf eine Anekdote, eigentlich nicht genug zu tun, um ihn zum Titelhelden zu machen, aber genau das ist die Art von schwachem Zusammenhang, der hier fast drei Stunden lang aufgefaltet wird. So handelt es sich auch das Bewegungsmaterial der Tänze nur an weni-

gen Moves entlang: Ein angewinkelter Arm, gleichzeitig expressiv und leer, mündet in eine getrippelte Drehung und in die Hiphop-Geste des Kapuze-Aufsetzens ohne Kapuze. Manchmal verbirgt sogar jemand das Gesicht in den Händen, gerade so zu langsam, dass es als Traurigkeitsklischee nicht mehr lesbar ist. Die Tänze-

rinnen und Tänzer, die allesamt ein je eigenes Vokabular in die Choreographie hineinnehmen, bilden nur eine lose Koppelung mit der Form: Nichts ist improvisiert, nichts zu verkörpert, es ist, als würden sie die Scores immer nur fast tanzen, und dann ist plötzlich so viel Platz.

Die Arbeit von Spängberg beschränkt sich nicht auf die Bühne: In seinen Programmheften und schlecht korrigierten Paperbacks performt er mit Text, performt einen durch ästhetische und politische Theorie bollernden Remix des Philosophen Gilles Deleuze vielleicht, aber in McDonald's-Uniform. Nur werden diese poetologischen Slogans dann nicht in das, was in der Praxis selbst passiert, hineingelesen. Konzept und Produkt winken sich hier eher in Sichtweite zu, und manchmal findet dabei Diffusion statt und manchmal auch nicht. Spängberg verteidigt damit die Praxis, verteidigt das Machen und Weitermachen des Tanzens gegenüber dem architektonischen Zugriff der Choreographie. Er ist damit nicht alleine, sondern Teil einer Bewegung im zeitgenössischen Tanz. Jetzt, wo immer mehr konzeptuelle choreographische Projekte, gar Retrospektiven in große Häuser der bildenden Kunst eingeladen werden, goldene Löwen gewinnen und trotzdem schlecht bezahlt sind, will diese Gegenbewegung Tanz als präzise Methode starkmachen, nicht nur als Einspieler für Galerien.

Es geht nicht um Tanz, der wieder zu sich selbst kommt, sondern um Tanzen, das aus sich selbst herausgeht ohne konservativen Rückwärtssalto zu früheren Disziplinen. Post-Dance ist der Begriff, der dafür ironisch und versuchsweise und vielleicht nur für eine Sekunde in den Raum gestellt wird. „Post-“ hier ausnahmsweise eben nicht, weil man sich sicher ist, dass etwas vorbei ist, nicht als Signal für Entkoffeinierung, sondern weil man nicht weiß und nicht mal wissen will, wie es von hier aus weitergeht.

Und Post-Dance muss trotzdem, auch wenn er noch so sehr auf die Praxis setzt, nichts mit Schweißglitzer auf Bühnen zu tun haben. Mette Edvardsen zum Beispiel tanzt nicht nur in der Landschaft von Gerhard Richter mit, sondern zeigte in Brüssel auch in „Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine“ ihre wunderschöne verkörperte Bibliothek. In den Räumen des Projekts gibt es eine Handvoll Performer, die hier Bücher „sind“, von Virginia Woolfs „Mrs. Dalloway“ bis Rainald Goetz' „Loslabern“. Das heißt, sie haben diese Bücher zu großen Teilen – einige über Jahre – auswendig gelernt. Wer sie „liest“, kann die Bewegungen des Lesens selbst nachverfolgen. Es zeigt die Form des Buchs, die ein echter Mensch performt, als stünde er daneben – keine Identifikation, sondern eine halbe Stunde schwacher Zusammenhang, choreographierter Möglichkeitsraum gemeinsamen Lesens. In einem ähnlichen Sinne sind Spängbergs Infrastrukturen herzlich, aber indifferent: Worum es geht, muss jeder für sich selbst entscheiden.

Am Ende von „Gerhard Richter, une pièce pour le théâtre“ beginnen Mette Edvardsen und Christine De Smedt eine Art Duett, ganz langsam und nah am Boden, und sprechen einen Dialog aus dem Film „Stepmom“: Susan Sarandon, tödlich krank und geschieden, gibt der neuen Frau ihres Manns Julia Roberts trotz aller romantischen Rivalität ihren Segen, diese dürfe sich um die Kinder kümmern, die sie hinterlässt: „I can have their past, you can have their future.“

Und man hat es zu diesem Zeitpunkt schon so oft gehört, und man könnte natürlich weinen, doch da ist nichts traurig, sondern nur vorbei. Es wird noch für einen Moment daran festgehalten, an dieser Erzählung von Familie, romantischer Liebe, Trauer, an dieser Form von Drama und Dramatisierung. Und das Festhalten vibriert. MAX WALLENHORST

Quim Bigas for Mambo blog Madrid

## La Natten me confunde

Translated by M. Miccolis



*Natten* places, in the courtyard of La Casa Encendida, the duration of one night, and spending the night, as something that could possibly trigger talks, conflicts, expectations, illusions, disenchantment, amongst other options and positions from which to place ourselves within this work. *Natten* searches for the opportunity of an encounter, of being together for a whole night, with a premise that is already choreographic in itself and a permanently subdued beauty.

After the first 44 minutes, which seem, to me, the most complicated as everyone's expectations start to settle in and it's clear that the work is not going to go beyond what we are seeing, I opt to sleep for a while. I firmly believe that there is something beautiful in an artistic work that gives you the option to sleep. To sleep, to wake up, seeing that we are all still there, going back to sleep, half sleep, deep sleep, snoring, opening our eyes, still being there ... A series of actions that keep repeating themselves throughout the piece with a sense of repetition in which the seven dancers of the work: Tamare Alegre, Liza Baiasnaja, Sidney Barnes, Marika Troili, Else Tunemyr, Emma Daniel and Alexandra Tweit, are immersed in.

When I wake up from my first 'moment of standstill', I find myself unable to see exactly what they are doing. The light is very dim and I think there is something interesting in the possibility to be constantly in connection with images that we can't see completely. I see it as a possible way of breaking off the supremacy of an image to enter a different domain that has no form but context. A place that doesn't have absolute images but always something that doesn't show, a non-totality that triggers a specific physical being. Something like a sunset; a sunset that lasts for 7 hours. A place between absolutes; between day and night, between the visible and the invisible, between being awake and being asleep, between discomfort and comfort ... Like a state of drowsiness during which what happens (and what happens to you) doesn't have an emotional charge but contributes to being together and with oneself.

Joining in, giving space, taking place, squinting, looking at the ceiling, watching the smoke go up, seeing something in the distance, watching the people around you, relaxing your eyes, doing nothing, being sluggish, sleeping, opening your eyes ....

The audience is seated/stretched out/reclined on a carpet of blankets and pillows that surrounds the whole courtyard. I can see a variety of positions worthy of a catalogue with people who have come together, people who have come alone, people who knew what to expect, people who didn't know what to expect ... A few people start leaving as the night goes on. At times, the behaviour of certain individuals, who want to leave and take everyone with them, gets me thinking. I see a couple in front of me where one tells the other they are leaving. The other person is in a state of drowsiness and, I dare to say, very comfortable. After two minutes they both leave. At around 2.30am, another person asks their partner: 'What shall we do?'. A few minutes later they both leave from the backstage door. The context of *Natten* allows me to think about the little autonomy we give ourselves when we go to the theatre with someone. And, in



all of this, the dependency monster appears. A monster that has distinctive features and that can come in the shape of a mobile phone or of being unable to move without the other's permission. I would have liked to hear a clear answer to this sort of couple's impositions: 'You can go. I'm staying here because something is happening to me'. *Natten* offers a shared introspective place, a place supported by a series of movements and actions constantly discontinued; which continue to give and leave and generate space. A space strongly supported by incessant music on loop for a long time that changes according to the melody and sound (trap music base, sounds of lightning and thunder, wind ...), a space simultaneously supported by the set-up laid out by the performers and the many things floating around that is not necessary to mention.



Throughout most of the night, it's almost as if the movement left its traces, as if timed but without taking up the time. And it flips me out. Just like that.

The structure of *Natten* is visible and quite strong. We can see the performers carry 'chops' in their hands to help them remember the different phases of the movement they have to repeat throughout the night and where they are in regard to the layout already created\*. The repetition of certain movements and patterns creates the possibility to feel as I were looking at the ocean or one of those immense landscapes that clear your mind and simply leave you staring into space, unfocused and timeless. There is something in the motion of duration that, often, ends up triggering a non-memory. Temporality, in *Natten*, is crucial. It's precisely because of the duration that we start losing expectations, identities, we fall asleep, our hair gets messed up, we let go ... and, what could be a modern piece, ends up turning, with time, simply and purely into what we are seeing: a structure of actions and dancing that hosts a meeting of "in-betweens" through a crepuscular appearance that cleanses our inner selves and suggests a joint state of drowsiness.

(\* I should try not to mention the name of the creator, simply to leave the work in that common space. But I can't. You go in knowing that you're going to see a piece by Marten Spangberg. His name fills the context and, even though at times we can forget about his presence and just be with what is happening around us, from time to time we can see him with his computer and he makes himself visible through certain musical choices. And during those moments, I think: 'Marten is here'. And he is. He is all along. He is like a veil that covers the work. But, thanks to the duration of the proposal and to the getting used to it, he starts to disappear and the audience, who thought they were going to see the 'enfant terrible' (as it says on the description), has fallen asleep and forgotten by then. In other cases, they shake it off the moment they leave the courtyard of La Casa Encendida and don't come back.)

The couple who had left from the backstage comes out again and finds the correct exit to go out. The piece, although made to accommodate and to offer space, leaves you always with the option to leave as well. Having said that, it wasn't easy for me to decide when to go to the toilet as, ironically, what they do, for some reason, requires your presence. As a matter of fact, there's a sort of tacit contract during the piece when you could leave despite being able to stay. In any case, *Natten* doesn't kick anyone out: you are fully aware of the fact that you are leaving and letting the night continue for other people in turn. You also know that you are staying because of a temporal contract. Although it seems endless, we all know that the piece lasts for 6 hours (even though, in the end, it lasted for 6 hours and 40 minutes).

The duration and the performativity of *Natten* leave me faced with a piece that I could call radical. The way it places and positions itself in front of the actual artistic context is, in my opinion, extremely mindful: there is no show but there



is space, there is no history or legitimacy but there is a present, there are no emotions but there is contemplation, there is no dramaturgy but there is evolution ... And, within its positioning, there is a lot of dancing. A lot of movement, a lot of worry, a lot of tact and a lot of tranquillity. The way they enter and exit the dancing body, as well as how they enter and exit their actions, puts everything they do in a quite meticulous 'horizontalty'; a non-hierarchy between the space we occupy and the one they do that transforms the piece into a remedy for the powerful cultural hyperactivity some of us are used to.

By the time more white light comes through, we are all as if nothing had happened. As if something had happened but not totally. But it happened. The performers are saying goodbye. So is Marten ... I'm woken up by the applause. It's daylight. It's time for breakfast. We end the *Natten* with a white coffee that allows me to write this text without falling completely asleep.

Still in that interspace, a place that is not mine nor yours, a place that is not conscious nor subconscious, a place that is no work nor pleasure ... a place in between.

A misty sunset.

Good *Natten*.

\* Pictures by Juanito Jones.

Mårten Spångberg, *Natten*

## Twilight Zone

### Ritmepolitiek en de poëtica van de dans

We leven in polariserende tijden: je bent voor of tegen, je bent vrij of gevangen, je hebt iets of niets. Kunsttheoretica Bojana Kunst ziet ook zulke tegenpolen in opvattingen over dans: beweging is gestructureerd of vrij, je ziet iets of niets, de toeschouwer staat tegenover de danser. Hoe kunnen we anders nadenken over dans, en zo ook over de wereld? Hoe kan een orde gepaard gaan met vrijheid, het gemeenschappelijke met het individuele? Door een nieuwe kijk op ritme zoekt Kunst naar een antwoord op deze vragen. Inspiratie vond ze in *Natten*, een voorstelling van Mårten Spångberg.

#### I.

Dans is een bijzonder interessant domein voor wie zich wil buigen over het paradoxale karakter van ritme: niet alleen omdat beweging en ritme binnen deze kunstvorm onafscheidelijk lijken, maar vooral omdat het zo moeilijk is om je in te beelden dat dans zonder ritme überhaupt zou bestaan. Toch werd dans in het verleden vooral geassocieerd met maat en metrum. Aangezien metrum sterk afhangt van muziek, krijgt het vaak vorm als een structuur van passen: muziek wordt geschreven op het ritme van die passen, zoals in de geschiedenis van het ballet bijvoorbeeld. Ritme is op zijn beurt nauw verweven met de disciplinaire orde en de choreografische organisatie, die in de geschiedenis van de dans vooral de muzikale orde volgde.

De relatie tussen ritme en dans lijkt echter tweeledig. Ritme brengt namelijk niet alleen een bepaalde structuur aan, maar is tegelijkertijd ook een explosieve kracht die de ervaring van het lichaam transformeert. Zo'n ervaring lijkt mijlenver af te staan van de disciplinaire kant van ritme. Ritme is met andere woorden een kracht die zowel structuur aanbrengt als structuur verstoort of tenietdoet.

De ambivalente relatie tussen dans en ritme wordt weerspiegeld in de institutionele en politieke contrasten die eigen zijn aan dans: vrijheid versus discipline, chaos versus orde, choreografische structuur versus bewegingsvrijheid. Die tegenstellingen houden de dualistische visie op dans in stand, waarbij het lichaam ofwel vrij is (bevrijd door zijn eigen, ritmische materie) ofwel onderworpen aan en beteugeld door de wetten van de choreografie. Het beeld van dans in onze westerse cultuur heeft met andere woorden iets diep-cartesiaans, waarbij het dualisme tussen lichaam en geest wordt uitgebreid naar dat tussen een 'structurende dans' en een 'bevrijdende dans'. Die zienswijze ligt nogal voor de hand, gezien de periode waarin de dans geïnstitutionaliseerd werd: rond die tijd ontstond namelijk ook de moderne idee van de rationele geest. En ondanks de felle institutionele kritiek op die dualistische benadering, blijft ze tot op heden voortbestaan.

In dit essay probeer ik een nieuwe weg in te slaan door ritme binnen de dans anders te bekijken: door de dans niet te rekenen tot óf het kamp van de discipline óf dat van de vrijheid, maar hem te beschouwen als een kunstvorm met zowel een productief als een individualiserend vermogen. Het besef dat dans een productief vermogen heeft, daagde toen ik in 2016 *Natten* bijwoonde in Brussel. Deze performance van de Zweedse choreograaf Mårten Spångberg zette me aan het denken over het poëtische potentieel van ritme, in de betekenis van (het Oudgriekse) 'poësis' als een generatieve kracht: ritme heeft alles te maken met creëren, met transformeren, met iets aan het licht brengen.

Je kunt *Natten* opvatten als een bijzondere performance, die de generatieve kracht van dans vergroot en tegelijk door middel van diezelfde dans het structurerend vermogen van choreografie in vraag stelt. Doorheen de performance — een schier



nacht, met het publiek genuit in het naardonker. Hoewel de dansers nu passen tellen en nu dans nog altijd gestructureerd is, komt hij dankzij de speciale schemersfeer en de voortdurend herhaalde lussen toch over als een generatieve kracht, een vormpotentieel. In die generatieve context schudt het lichaam elk soort identiteit van zich af, maar tegelijkertijd blijft het onvermijdelijk een dansend lichaam dat vormen genereert: telkens wanneer een subject een onderscheidbare vorm opvoert in het bijzijn van de anderen, ontstaat er opnieuw een bepaald onderscheid. In dit werk projecteert de dans zich niet in de richting van 'dingen die nog moeten komen', maar ontpopt hij zich eerder als de heterogeniteit van het heden, een schemerige en sfeervolle lineariteit. Zo'n niet-projectieve dans vormt geen structurerende kracht (hij beweegt namelijk nergens naartoe), maar hij is net zomin geïmproviseerd (en dus ook niet ogenblikkelijk of enkel afhankelijk van het huidige moment). Hij bestaat op een of andere manier ergens tussenin: op een onderscheidbaar ogenblik, als een vorm die verschijnt, als het resultaat van zijn eigen productiviteit.

De dans in *Natten* leunt dicht aan bij wat we een 'poëtische individuatie' zouden kunnen noemen: hij is repetitief en toch specifiek, en creëert een onderscheidbare vorm. Om de bijzondere manier waarop die vorm ontstaat te ontleden, is het alledaagse concept van 'ritme' cruciaal. Ritme hoort namelijk ook bij dans als een poëtische vorm van individuatie. Dans brengt een andere tijdspolitiek aan de oppervlakte binnen het event, dat nu niet langer te maken heeft met het contrast tussen discipline en vrijheid, maar wel met het uitbreiden van het arsenaal aan bewegingsvormen die tot dans kunnen leiden. De performance-als-event bestaat dan uit de instabiliteit van de dansvorm zelf, de instabiliteit die gepaard gaat met 'wat het betekent om te dansen'.

## II.

In wat volgt zou ik graag dieper ingaan op de poëtische productiviteit van ritme, die ontstaat als een gemeenschappelijk onderscheid. Dans wordt een kracht doordat iets verschijnt, er blijft bestaan, vorm krijgt tussen verleden en toekomst. Zo'n onderscheid kan enkel tot stand komen in het gemeenschappelijke, wanneer het wordt waargenomen en gedeeld met anderen. Die idee kan ons helpen om de weg te bereiden voor een alternatieve interpretatie van dans als een poëtische (en politieke), productieve kracht.

Die productiviteit kunnen we enerzijds niet categoriseren onder de disciplinaire choreografie van het metrum, maar verschilt anderzijds ook van ritme als een kinetisch en gevoelsmatig begrip dat weerstand biedt aan metrum via een gedeelde lichamelijke en zintuiglijke ervaring. De specifieke modaliteit van ritme die ik hier probeer te schetsen, drukt de dynamische en dramatische mix uit van verschillende soorten instabiliteit die toch een onderscheid in het leven roepen: een vorm ontstaat doordat hij afwijkt van de andere. Vanuit dit oogpunt is vorm, zowel tijdens het dansen als tijdens het verkennen van andere bewegingen, onstabiel. En — dit is cruciaal voor onze conceptualisatie van ritme — dat geldt net zozeer voor de perceptie ervan.

Als dat het geval is, dan wekt het ritme van een performance eigenlijk de paradoxale indruk een dynamische stabiliteit te zijn, of beter: een dynamische, gemeenschappelijke vorm die aan beweging zijn specificiteit, zijn materialiteit en zijn bestaan doorheen de tijd verleent. We zien die dynamische vorm, nemen hem waar, ontvangen hem, maar wanneer we kijken naar iets dat beweegt, bewegen we zelf ook. In die zin is elke vorm onvermijdelijk een dynamische vorm. En als kunst ervoor zorgt dat elke vorm dynamisch is, zoals filosoof Brian Massumi zou stellen (Massumi, 2008), dan zouden we daaraan kunnen toevoegen dat ritme een tijdsdimensie vormt waarbinnen die dynamiek niet alleen uitdrukking krijgt, maar waarbinnen hij ontstaat en gespeeld wordt.

Een vergelijkbare opvatting van het concept 'ritme' komt naar voren in een eerder klassieke etymologische tekst die vrijwel onopgemerkt bleef binnen de performance- en dansstudies. In 1951 publiceerde Émile Benveniste, een Syrische wetenschapper die in zijn jeugd vanuit Aleppo naar Frankrijk was gevlucht, het essay *The Notion of 'Rhythm' in its Linguistic Expression*. Daarin neemt hij de Griekse term *rhythmós* onder de loep en herschrijft hij de gebruikelijke etymologie van het woord.

Volgens Benveniste moeten we de oorsprong van het begrip in de context plaatsen van de Ionische natuurfilosofen en hun vocabularium, met bijzondere aandacht voor Democritus. *Rhythmós* blijkt een van de meest essentiële concepten om een onderscheidbare vorm te beschrijven: een proportie, een karakter, het ordenen van onderdelen tot een typisch geheel. Benveniste toont aan dat het begrip *rhythmós* in de natuurfilosofie altijd verband houdt met de idee van een onderscheidbare vorm — met dien verstande dat 'vorm' hier een ietwat andere betekenis krijgt dan de andere Griekse woorden voor vorm, zoals *eidós*, *morphé* en *ousia*. Benveniste stelt namelijk dat *rhythmós* een speciaal soort vorm is, waarvan de eigenlijke betekenis in de staart zit — in het achtervoegsel (*th*)*mós*.

*Rhythmós* bestaat uit twee delen: *rhein* (vloeien) en (*th*)*mós*. Benveniste maakt brandhout van de populaire opvatting dat *rhythmós* zou afstammen van het woord 'vloeien' en plaatst vraagtekens bij de simplistische uitleg dat de oude Grieken ritme ontdekt zouden hebben toen ze het spel van de golven langs de oevers van de rivier aanschouwden (met enkele voorbeelden toont de auteur aan dat *rhythmós* in het presocratische Griekenland nooit gebruikt werd om het voortvloeien van een rivier aan te duiden). Benveniste betoogt heel overtuigend dat de foutieve interpretatie/betekenis van het woord 'ritme' te wijten is aan oppervlakkige etymologische analyses die de samenstelling van het woord verkeerd begrepen. Het achtervoegsel (*th*)*mós* voegt namelijk een belangrijke nuance toe: het beschrijft "de specifieke manier van vloeien" (Benveniste, 286). Het suffix (*th*)*mós* verdient dus extra aandacht — niet omwille van zijn betekenis, maar omwille van het bijzondere gevoel dat het aan abstracte woorden en concepten verleent. "Het verwijst niet naar de verwezenlijking van het begrip, maar naar de specifieke modaliteit van die verwezenlijking zoals we ze waarnemen met onze ogen" (Benveniste, 285). Die bevinding wordt gestaafd door andere Oudgriekse woorden die op (*th*)*mós* eindigen. Benveniste haalt onder meer *orchethmós* aan, of de manier waarop we een specifieke dans waarnemen (dit begrip verschilt van *orchesis*, wat verwijst naar de activiteit van het dansen zelf), en *stathmós*, de positie die iets aanneemt om in balans te komen (wat dan weer verschilt van *stasis*: zich in een bepaalde positie bevinden).

Gezien de context waarin *rhythmós* verschijnt, schrijft Benveniste, "verwijst het naar de vorm op het moment dat die wordt aangenomen door iets vloeiends, iets beweeglijks. Het verwijst naar de vorm van iets dat geen organische consistentie heeft, dat in het patroon van een vloeibaar element past, van een willekeurig gevormde letter, van een gewaad dat je naar eigen goeddunken drapeert, van een bepaalde stemming of aard" (Benveniste, 286). Als concept is het het best geschikt om disposities en configuraties te beschrijven die geen vaste vorm of natuurlijke noodzaak hebben en die "ontstaan uit een situatie die altijd onderhevig is aan verandering" (Benveniste, 286). *Rhythmós* heeft met andere woorden niet alleen te maken met de dynamische realiteit zoals we die tijdens het voortvloeien observeren, maar ook met de vorm van die dynamiek zelf.

Wat betekent dit inzicht nu precies voor dans en performance? Om die vraag te kunnen beantwoorden, moeten we nog even bij de tekst van Benveniste blijven en opmerken hoe *scenisch* de nuance die het suffix (*th*)*hmós* toevoegt eigenlijk is: de dynamische

van het probleem, zouden we zijn benadering van de dynamiek van de ritmische vorm als participatief kunnen bestempelen. De dynamische vorm fungeert hier als een vorm die verandert doorheen de tijd, of anders gezegd: als de vluchtigheid van vorm die ontstaat door een beweging in de tijd. Maar die vluchtigheid van vorm ontstaat alleen op het moment dat hij bijgewoond wordt. Alleen in dat vluchtige, gedeelde moment kunnen we het onderscheid bevatten. Vanuit dit oogpunt wordt *rhythmós* een vorm van onderscheid die ontstaat uit de spanning van wat er verschijnt op het moment dat het bijgewoond wordt. Het is een specifieke ruimtelijke configuratie van de tijd, een condensatie zonder fixatie, net zoals de *stathmós* die Benveniste als voorbeeld gebruikt. *Stathmós* verwijst naar een positie gevormd op het moment dat iets in evenwicht komt. Het is geen bestaande positie die zomaar voor het grijpen ligt of zomaar ingenomen kan worden. Ritme is vluchtig en riskant, uitgesteld en standvastig — het onderscheidt zich door de echo's van vorige momenten die erin voortleven, maar ook door zich open te stellen voor de onbekende toekomst, waardoor het 'nu' van het heden continu hersteld en heruitgevonden wordt. Ritme zorgt ervoor dat lichamen en dingen zich kunnen onderscheiden in een altijd veranderende continuïteit van dingen.

Maar die oneindige, bijzondere beweging is pas mogelijk wanneer ze bijgewoond wordt. In die zin is ritme iets dat nauw verweven is met de gedeelde of gemeenschappelijke tijd: het wordt niet alleen waargenomen, maar het gebeurt ook. Zo kunnen we ritme als een dynamische vorm met het begrip 'event' verbinden: ritme is alleen onderscheidbaar wanneer het tegelijkertijd gedeeld is, wanneer het als dynamische vorm een event is.

### III.

Wanneer we het bovenstaande in acht nemen, behoren zowel het aanbrengen als het omverwerpen van structuur tot het poëtische proces. Dan kunnen we ritme omschrijven als een zichtbare, hoorbare en voelbare dynamische kracht die voor stabiliteit zorgt, maar die tegelijkertijd voortdurend onderhevig is aan zijn eigen veranderingen. Dat scenische vermogen van ritme als een gedeelde ervaring heeft echter nog een andere belangrijke eigenschap: het feit dat ritme scenisch is, heeft ook te maken met het feit dat het altijd in een 'tussen-tijd' gebeurt — het is dat moment en niet dit moment. Alleen zo kunnen we ritme als een dynamische vorm benaderen.

In *Natten* van Mårten Spångberg zit die eigenschap vervat in het gebruik van schemerzones: de dans genereert vormen wanneer hij wordt bijgewoond, maar amper zichtbaar is. Het gedeelde onderscheid komt dan neer op een onderscheid dat zich tussen twee verwante maar toch verscheiden kwaliteiten bevindt. Hier is het interessant om de beroemde regels uit 1837: *Of the Refrain* van Deleuze en Guattari erbij te nemen: "Metrum is dogmatisch, maar ritme is kritisch; het verbindt kritieke momenten, of het verbindt zichzelf door van de ene naar de andere omgeving over te gaan." (Deleuze en Guattari, 313) Het adjectief 'kritisch', dat de auteurs hier lijnrecht tegenover 'dogmatisch' plaatsen, moeten we niet interpreteren als het vermogen om een kritische afstand te bewaren; het bevindt zich eerder op de scheidingslijn "tussen dag en nacht, in het schemerlicht, *twilight* of *Zwielicht*, 'Haecceïteit'" (Deleuze en Guattari, 312).

Deze omschrijving, die ritme tussen twee verwante en toch verscheiden kwaliteiten plaatst — in de schemering — vat goed samen wat het betekent om ritme als een productieve kracht te (her)interpreteren: het is een onderscheidende kracht, een compositie van individuatie. Ritme is haecceïteit, het onthult de 'ditheid' van een ding, zonder er evenwel een identiteit aan toe te kennen. Als haecceïteit in een talige context te maken heeft met specifieke formuleringen zoals "dit is gelijk aan dit, maar niet aan dat", dan houdt het in de context van een performance verband met ritme: de herhaling is een drijvende kracht omdat ze tot de schemerzone behoort, tot een atmosferische 'tussenin'-staat die blijft voortduren — en ritme is scenisch omdat het tot diezelfde schemerzone behoort: het is dit moment en kan niet tegelijkertijd ook dat moment zijn.

In die zin is ritme nauw verbonden met de visie van Deleuze en Guattari op herhaling. Ritme is kritisch omdat afwisseling en herhaling zich kritisch tot elkaar verhouden: afwisseling is ritmisch en herhaling is dat niet, maar toch zorgt herhaling ervoor dat er ritme ontstaat. "Een productieve herhaling heeft niets te maken met reproductief metrum." (Deleuze en Guattari, 314) Ritme is kritisch omdat het in zijn herhaling productief is, het is productief omwille van zijn repetitieve afwisseling, en repetitief omdat het een onderscheidbare kracht is.

Het begrip 'haecceïteit' dat net opdook, zou ik nu graag toepassen op *Natten*, de performance van Mårten Spångberg die ik in mei 2016 in de Brusselse kapel van Les Brigittines bijwoonde. De voorstelling begon om 23 uur en duurde tot in de vroege uurtjes. De performance vulde de nacht met zijn uitgesponnen, repetitieve danssequenties, die rondcirkelden, transformeerden, en samen met de ambientmuzieksequenties eindeloos leken aan te houden. Op het eerste gezicht weerstaan de specifieke duur en de tijdssetting van deze performance elke vorm van conceptualisatie. De focus ligt immers op de individuele beleving van slapeloosheid, van de gedanst herhalings en de verslavende nachtelijke dimensie van de performance.

Omdat je als toeschouwer slaperig wordt, in het duister zit, indommelt en ergens tussen slapen en waken belandt, lijkt het ook logisch om hier op de individuele ervaring te focussen — een aanstekelijke of zelfs besmettelijke ervaring waarbij de combinatie van het repetitieve ritme en de nachtelijke vermoeidheid een deels onbewuste staat van participatie opwekt. De ervaring transformeerde het publiek op een bepaalde manier, en lokte ons mee in een dans van de nacht, van slaap, dromen, nachtmerries en pure uitputting, soms zelfs extase. Maar wanneer we hier even afstand van nemen, zouden we dit slapeloze proces ook kunnen interpreteren als het poëtische vermogen om iets te produceren, een onderscheidbare vorm in het leven te roepen, een heel alerte compositie. En dat poëtische vermogen zit verscholen in de schemering. Iets onderscheidt zich pas en wordt pas iets individueels wanneer het tot de schemer behoort. Het schemerlicht is de omgeving bij uitstek waar onderscheidende eigenschappen tot leven komen en waar die kwaliteiten opduiken die iets uniek maken: de haecceïteit of 'ditheid'. De schemering is dan een intrinsiek onderdeel van de scenische dimensie van ritme, net als het feit dat het stevast wordt bijgewoond. Het ritme verschijnt in de nabijheid van anderen, maar over die nabijheid tasten we (letterlijk) in het duister — namelijk in diezelfde duisternis die nodig is om de dynamische vorm te kunnen onderscheiden.

In *Natten* doorstaat de dans net dit soort duisternis: een slapeloze toestand waarin vormen en figuren als disposities verschijnen, de productie van een onderscheid dat maar blijft voortduren. Gedurende sequenties van meer dan een halfuur lang herhalen de dansers bewegingsstructuren die parallel lopen met de lussen in de muziek; ze zingen samen eindeloos voort; ze kreunen in het duister; ... Maar wat ze ook doen en doorstaan, het is erg gestructureerd én tegelijkertijd ook uitgevoerd met een zekere gelatenheid en je-m'-en-foutisme. Insomnia, de 'tussenintoestand' van iemand die slaapt en continu weer wakker wordt, vormt het hart van het poëtische productievermogen. Haecceïteit staat centraal binnen zo'n poëtica, in het gedeelde onderscheid en het obscure, huidige moment. Het gaat daarbij niet om een soort 'onmiddellijkheid', maar eerder om het feit dat, eerder wanneer er iets verschijnt of wanneer er een vorm ontstaat — een pas, een draai, een beweging die aanvat of stilvalt — zich de contouren van een structuur al aftekenen, een breuk in de tijd, het bevroren van wat was en wat zou kunnen zijn, een politiek waarin de gedeelde beweging gekneet wordt en vorm krijgt.

dualiteit van metrum versus ritme (met zijn transformerende vrijheid) en dat dans de generatieve capaciteit toedicht een verschil te maken in tijd en ruimte. Precies door zijn eigen georganiseerdheid komt dans over als iets niet-georganiseerd, als een beweging gevormd door initiële momenten in de schemering die eindeloos herhaald kunnen worden, maar die we tegelijkertijd — dankzij de duisternis in het hart van de structurele duidelijkheid — kunnen beschouwen als het potentieel van iets dat ‘nog niet’ is.

Dat is exact hoe ritme in performances zoals *Natten* de stabiliteit ondergraaft van wat dans zou kunnen zijn. Het zet de deur op een kier voor de bizarre, duistere, volkse kant van dans, die doorheen de geschiedenis enerzijds getemd werd door, en onderworpen werd aan de choreografische bewegingsstructuren, en anderzijds werd opgevoerd als een soort pure onmiddellijkheid, dankzij de kinetische en empathische veralgemening dat ritme gelijk is aan gedeelde transformatie. Maar dans is niet gelijk aan discipline, noch aan vrijheid — het is orde noch chaos, repetitief noch transformerend, taal noch lichaam, gemedieerd noch rechtstreeks. Het is eerder een politieke kracht die een scenisch onderscheid mogelijk maakt, een dispositie van zaken (mensen, dingen, ondingen, ietsen en nietsen) die bewegen: “Dans is een subject dat vorm opvoert.” (Spångberg, *Postdance*) In die zin ontpopt dans zich als het kritische potentieel van iets dat niet affirmatief noch uitsluitend negatief is, maar dat eindeloos en koppig aandringt, opeist en vasthoudt. Ik zou zelfs durven stellen dat precies deze eigenschap onze idee van ‘wat het betekent om te dansen’ in twijfel trekt en verruimt: het betekent dat we een andere dimensie openen binnen de tijd waarin we rondwaren.

Voortbouwend op Friedrich Hölderlin argumenteert filosoof Giorgio Agamben dat ritme de originele structuur van een kunstwerk blootlegt: “Doordat het aan de mens zijn authentieke temporele dimensie onthult, creëert het kunstwerk voor hem ook een ruimte waarbinnen hij deel kan uitmaken van de wereld, de enige ruimte waarbinnen hij zijn oorspronkelijke bestaan op aarde kan begrijpen en zijn huidige waarheid kan herontdekken binnen de onstuitbare en lineair voortvloeiende tijd.” (Agamben, “The Original Structure of the Work of Art,” *The Man Without Content*, 101) Dat wordt mogelijk omdat ritme een dynamische vorm is, maar ook omdat ritme verband houdt met de haecceïteit die onze staat van ‘in de tijd zijn’ transformeert tot een toestand die productief is (in de betekenis van poësis).

Ritme is nauw verweven met de productieve dimensie van poësis, of met andere woorden: met de productieve kracht waardoor iets aanwezig wordt. Het productieve vermogen van ritme houdt in dat we de desorganisatie en de compositie van bewegingen tegelijkertijd moeten beschouwen — op exact hetzelfde moment. Dat is waaruit de dans als event bestaat. Dit betekent dan weer dat dans niet altijd een tegengesteld antwoord biedt aan het dogmatische metrum: stilte, voeten die zich niet roeren, geen organisatie, maar ook exact het tegenovergestelde: meer voetenwerk, meer lawaai, meer compositie! Hierdoor wordt het domein van de dans gevoelig vergroot en verkent het bewegingen die mijlenver afstaan van zijn organische relatie tot het lichaam. Tijdens zulke events speelt ritme een cruciale rol: niet omwille van zijn kinetische kracht of de kracht van zijn bevelende beats, maar wél omdat het een productief bewegingsvermogen is dat hand in hand gaat met politieke vragen rond de manier waarop beweging verandering teweegbrengt.

In die zin zijn de ritmepolitiek van de dans en de poëtische productie van dans nauw verbonden met elkaar. De nieuwe vormen die dans genereert, hebben niet zozeer te maken met nieuwe structuren, maar wel met verschillende mogelijkheden om binnen de tijd te bestaan. Hierdoor kunnen we dans beschrijven als een soort van scenische opschorting, een tijdelijk *abandon*, een productie van vorm in verlatenheid — allemaal opvattingen die op een boeiende manier weerwoord kunnen bieden aan de logistieke, algoritmische en technische procedures die vandaag de dag overheersen, om zo de weg te bereiden voor andere mobiliseringsmogelijkheden.

Dans is dan een kracht die zorgt voor het onderscheid binnen onze gemeenschappelijkheid, een verbazend sterke kracht die aanwezigheden oproept en die zichzelf ontpopt als de duistere, scenische capaciteit om vorm te onthullen in de nabijheid van anderen. Het herstelt de structuur, maar op een heel specifieke manier: als een poëtisch, uniek productief vermogen dat andere mogelijkheden van ‘in de tijd zijn’ blootlegt terwijl we bewegen.

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## ESSAY

Leestijd 14 — 17 minuten

15.06.2017

**Black Box Spring 2017**

**Sputnik *Natten***

**(or: On Namelessness, but not in English)**

Ana Vujanović



At a public talk organised within the symposium “(re-)combining the in-between”, which took place last summer (2016) in Munich, Walter Heun asked me and several other discussants about the performances we found especially appealing. After a hesitation I said that what excites me most is when a performance attracts me even if I don’t understand it completely, when there is something intriguing, something that affects me strongly but I don’t know how to name it. And voilà: only a few days later I attended Mårten Spångberg’s *Natten* at ImpulsTanz festival in Vienna. It is indeed one of the most intriguing artistic experiences I’ve had in many years, at the same time fascinating and obscure, familiar and strange, enjoyable and hard to describe. After I had a few talks with Spångberg in which I tried to find words to explain my excitement about the piece, mostly in vain – the same struggle that I had with colleagues who disliked it – he proposed to me to write about *Natten*, which I already wanted to do myself, if only I knew how.

And here I am.

After some time spent in digesting what I had seen I realised that I didn’t have a space in my head in which I could situate *Natten*. I can name it a theoretical-fiction performance and recognise some traces of Caravaggio’s tenebrism, Adorno’s negative dialectic (maybe), Deleuze, Cunningham, Trisha Brown, Agamben, John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (suspiciously), Rancière,



Negarestani, and Butler's uninhabitable zones (too complicated), and if I was to write an academic essay or a Ph.D. I would certainly rely on these references. But since I don't have to respond to those sorts of demands I prefer acknowledging that these traces are rather well-known shortcuts that don't help me much in thinking of *Natten* as *Natten*. Ok, that can be a problem. But I took it in a sporty way. And now I will try to perform the opposite manoeuvre: instead of trying to explain the performance by the conceptual platforms I have in my head, I will try to 'extend my head', to open my perception and discourse, so that a new space for *Natten* can emerge from the very process of speculating, remembering, analysing, and trying to speak about it. It may be that *our appreciation of art begins necessarily with the forgetting of art*. Already for that, I appreciate *Natten* very much – for its unpretentious call to think together, for opening up for a new experience, and for travelling together towards the uncertain potentiality of my capability to think and talk about art.

To outline some material ground for that journey I would remark that *Natten* ('The Night' in Swedish) is a seven hour-long choreography, taking place during the night time, with nine dancers, who spend almost all that time on the stage, walking, sometimes sitting on the floor and checking their notes or just taking a rest, standing still, singing, and dancing in different group formations, rarely in solos. The atmosphere is dark and somewhat mysterious. However, it is not created as a fiction with highly professional theatre equipment, which hides its operating mechanisms. It is made manually and we see Mårten Spångberg adjusting the video image, working a fog machine, or dancers changing clothes on stage. Yet, the mysterious ambience is there. Apart from having fog in some moments, the lights are in principle strongly dimmed; sometimes they almost fade out and it is only computer or smartphone screens that are left flickering, which drabs all the colours so that the performance is almost black and white. Much more black than white, though. Dark grey is its main colour. In addition, there are some objects and object arrangements around: vases with bouquets of red roses, wooden sticks forming a tripod-like shape, shiny curtains or their tatters hanging from the ceiling... Their purpose is unknown. A great variety of music is played throughout the piece, from contemporary experimental music (Greg Heines, Keiji Haino, Machinefabriek) to post-rock and punk (Joy Division, Tortoise) to R&B (Jhene Aiko, Prince, Justin Timberlake) and hip-hop (Kendrick Lamar, Future, Drake). Although disparate in many ways, most of the tunes are slow, sometimes reduced to an instrumental or additionally slowed down, and they evoke sadness and nostalgia. Dance movements are also performed slowly, with released muscle tension and a relatively small spatial spread. There are no ecstatic bodies, big jumps, strong accents or anything that usually attracts our gaze. I see that these hardly visible creatures have a thin layer of artificiality or an emptied representation added to their pedestrian dancing bodies, but I don't know what they represent. Their dance in some moments looks like a historical quotation but most of the time I find it just abstract and dreamy. Due to the simultaneous slow-motion and effortless precision, it looks like the dancers materially and with gentle care create dance where a ghost-like creature remains in the space after the dancers move away to another spot. There is something we can identify as sequences and scenes of the performance, but since everything is so slow and long, and the dramaturgy is spiral and wavy rather than linear, the temporality of *Natten* dissolves its own structure before our eyes and emerges as an undividable, slowly rolling event. *A ( )hole*.

The performance takes place in a gallery space (Hofstallung at mumok), with the audience sitting around but without physical participation in the piece. All the time there is the fourth wall between us, the performance and audience, and the performers never acknowledge our presence. In a way, the piece is arrogant: for all seven hours it doesn't try to entertain us nor communicate whatsoever. But I must be honest: there is no arrogance in the piece. It is gentle and subtle, and at worst indifferent to us, the audience. That indifference may indeed be the worst because it vibrates with a tone of self-sufficiency. It is as if the performance says: I exist and you may as well not be

here... I don't need you to justify my existence. I just invite you to travel with me. If you want. The communication that circulates in the room is loose, pretty open, and in fact everyone can find her place. If only she wants to.

It was interesting to be a member of that audience, almost left alone with each other – together and alone, together with the piece and alone – and to observe us at the same time. There was one moment which was organised differently. It was 'a time to sleep', when the dancers were sitting on the floor and singing repetitively a very slow and gentle kind of folk song (Ásgeir's "Going Home", slowed down), which sounded like a lullaby. Most of us really fell asleep, and it was the only collective moment, the moment when the audience behaved as a group. That collectivity was, however, not an elaborated conceptual or ideological proposition. It was a physical, bodily practice – sleeping; not together, next to each other. Otherwise, the visitors and spectators organised their time and space individually. One synchronic overview went like this: a man sitting next to me leaned against the wall, let his smartphone rest on his lap, and took a nap. Two others, further on his left, were sitting in the same position while staring at the stage. A young woman on my right was reading the book *Natten*, which accompanies the performance. How can she read in the dark? I wondered. Can she? A post/former-hippy, middle-age couple in front of me brought some beer and lay on the floor in the spooning position. They were hot. I thought: in this anonymity of the audience, at 1 a.m., freed from expectations, and feeling cool for attending such a contemporary artistic event where nothing was forbidden, they would soon have sex.

Some people later said that they "didn't get much from the performance." I tried to understand that impression, since I got this huge burden which obsesses me and about which I don't even know how to speak without shattering it. One explanation that came to my mind is that you in fact got what you gave. If you were mostly busy with checking Facebook – and nobody on the stage prevented you from doing that – of course you didn't get a lot from the performance. You are not Napoleon, in mythology known for his ability to hold his focus on four things at the same time. So, this might be the state of affairs: you yourself didn't pay attention to what was happening on the stage, and there was *something* always happening there, and as a consequence you simply didn't get that 'thing'. This is a far-reaching game proposed by *Natten*, this invitation to give your attention to something that doesn't require it, and then go home with 'some-thing' that filled your attention, or with 'no-thing', or with 'not-much-things' between these extremes. A marginal thought is that it also probes our contemporary selves where human biological evolution doesn't follow new life forms and practices, and a multi-tasking doer, the hero of our time, actually does not perform all these tasks with the same efficacy (and passion!) as she would with one task only.

I also didn't follow the performance with my eyes wide open all the time. For a while I would be curious to follow a dancer leaving the group and going to his 'station' on the stage, where he would take a sip of water and read from a notebook. I would then lose interest and look around. Then I would get back and try to predict how the new dance sequence would develop. I vaguely remembered that formation, with three of them dancing together and one alone, far from the group. Very often I would follow one particular performer (Hana Lee Erdman), whose precision and grace I adored. I tried to understand why I was always able to recognise her in that half-dark, and I caught my thought: although all the performers were well concentrated and there was almost no difference in their performing mode, that one performer embodied the very thought of the piece. But what was the thought of *Natten*? ...I would observe Hana Erdman again: she in fact dances as if she leaves the traces of former movements visible like long-exposed photographs. Then I would briefly comment on that to my girlfriend sitting next to me. She would add another comment and we would start chatting on some unrelated topic. Then I would go back to the video, where the image of fog was still lingering over the screen. Or once I just closed my eyes and enjoyed listening to Prince's "Purple Rain"...



Attending *Natten* was similar to travelling by the night train, in a compartment with a stranger. Travelling the whole night... to Istanbul, let's say. And during the travel, my co-traveller would sometimes address me. Sometimes, I would reply. In some moments we would talk. Then, since we don't have much to share, the conversation would fade out... And he would take a nap. I would observe him. I would notice rapid movements of his eyes, and start speculating on his life, his history, his dreams... Gradually, he would become less strange to me. Some of his remarks are trivial, but others resonate with me. He would then go to the toilet. And when he would get back after 10 minutes or even longer, I would share with him something that I don't share with many people. A memory from my childhood. Maybe because he doesn't seem particularly curious about it. Time is passing... And we are still there, tied by the space and time spent together. For a moment I would feel aroused. ...As the night is rolling and the time passing is growing bigger and we stop dividing it, he would become more than an accidental anonymous fellow-traveller to me, a kind of "sputnik", with the connotation of Slavic languages given to that word. *Sputnik* (*sputnjik* or *saputnik*), in Russian, Polish, or Serbo-Croatian adds something to the fellow with whom I travel. (You can call it a (false) promise, but it can well be ontologically new.) She or he is a companion, and could even be a life companion, a life partner, the one who travels with you through life. Travelling together with a sputnik erodes the borders between you and her as autonomous and self-indulgent individuals, not in terms of fusing you in one harmonious being, but in terms of bringing about the life as the third entity in your journey. The entity around which you become sputniks to each other. And about which you start to take care, together. It is really not far from how *Natten*, with its dimmed lights, slow-moving performers, dream-like set design and music, gradually brings about the experience of dance as a 'thing' between the stage and the audience. To travel with us through that long night, and invite us to take care of it. *Like a dust-covered box, you vaguely remember you exhumed in the night from under your bed.* It is speculatively possible that the dance would stay there even if we were not present, that *dance exists without us*. But ontologically speaking, *Natten* is a journey which exists only to the extent someone takes care of that experience of dance. That is why if everyone would leave, no-thing would remain. In that

way, *Natten*, without saying a word, underlines the sociability that characterises every performance, even when the others, the sputniks are not empirically present. It is what allows me to speak about producing new publics and a new ‘publicness’ by this performance, which Spångberg himself mentioned in an interview, though without elaborating on what he meant. Maybe what he intuitively and where our thoughts intersect is that a new public arises when a new thing is brought into the world, and, around that thing, when people start taking care of it, together.

The spiral dramaturgy of the piece, which I mentioned earlier, manifests in the composition that progresses somewhere, then goes back to an earlier point, and from that point continues in a new direction. These points – a dance material (Birgit Åkesson’s solos), a tune (Samuel Barber’s “Te deum”), or a group formation (two trios) – although changed, mixed, and remixed when they reappear, pop up as what we know, like loose and brief anchors for our perception, but only to fail us in the next moment by not continuing in the way we expect. And we do expect a continuation in a certain direction on the ground of what was previously seen emerging from that point. Namely, we are looking for patterns which can organise and systematise our experience. But it doesn’t happen, and *Natten* seems to revisit and erase its traces all the time. The eponymous book is composed in the same way and makes this dramaturgy even more obvious. The recurrent points are for instance the line “This story is told”, the dream motif, places like the city and the street, the colour grey, the figure of the dead sister, the questions of death and time, etc. By going back and forth, and from the changed back to a new forth, at one point the book stops being exciting or ‘dramatic’, so to speak. When it, by that gesture, leaves the frame of the horror genre, we realise that it won’t bring us very far... and, if we accept the game, we let the book bring us where it can, or where it wants. This dramaturgy resembles the process of having obsessive thoughts to which we get back, but which triggers us to do different things in response each time. That is why it doesn’t seem sufficient to me to say that the dramaturgy of Spångberg’s recent works forms a sort of landscape. To an extent it does, but every piece has its specificities. And if *La Substance, but in English* and especially *Internet* were mostly composed like landscapes, with no perspective as a spatiotemporal location of one subject (of creation or observation), *Natten*’s composition is rather like a spiral and only its set design engages the principles of landscape in a strict sense. How I see it, that dramaturgy is neither like a concentric circle nor about any kind of hermeneutics. The spiral dramaturgy of *Natten* resembles the messy squiggle of a spring that curves and swirls throughout a sheet of paper, all the time losing and finding itself again.

In the moments of anchoring (finding itself again), there is something like experience formation on the verge of language. Something appears over there – I don’t know exactly what it is (or what it represents) – and I face it, disarmed. It hits me. The first time it occurs, it is an unknown thing to me, and when it passes I feel relieved: It was not important and it passed, I don’t need to think further about it. But then, it comes back, and hits me again. When it hits me again, it alerts me, it calls me to find a name for it, to understand it, to respond, and I know I must react because it stays. It is, in my view at least, not the first hit which is the event, as Mårten Spångberg suggested in an interview I made with him. For me, *Natten* is not that much an event of dance as it is about losing and finding the experience of dance again and again. The first hit comes in a way from the future. We don’t have a name for it and tend to dismiss it. The composition of the piece itself allows us to forget that hit. “What was that? I don’t know. Ok, let’s move further.” That is what I did. In a way, I forgive the first hit. What I cannot forgive is that it comes again and starts rebounding. Then it stays with me, like the train-travel or the life between me and my sputnik(s), and I face the limits of my language in the eye contact with the nameless. The existence of the thing leaks from the future and not from the past that I know, and that can help me with its repository of ‘proper’ names. Can I dare to compare it with how we European citizens, and especially European governments, act in the midst of the so-called refugee crisis? ‘They’ started coming from elsewhere. We ignored it. But they continued coming. There is no place for them in



the space we have. Still, they stayed. It hit us. Now it is rebounding... And we panic, because we have to respond to their existence... It is now present between us, taking its place.

However, we know that the period of the thing rebounding after it hit our body cannot last forever, for we humans are experts in symbolising. We want daylight. We cannot let things just happen around us. Or just 'be' around. We want to stop them hitting us by finding their equivalence in words. It is how we domesticate nature, the dark matter, the refugee, art, existence itself. And that is where I would agree with Spångberg, who said: "The thing bounces, bounces, bounces... and when it stops bouncing it is completely capitalised." It is true, and that is why, from an experiential (and not institutional) standpoint, the performance truly exhausts itself in performing. Already in the next moment, there are names, symbols, concepts, discourses, and nothing remains. Then we write history and sell ('immaterial') goods.

The last issue I would like to tackle here is exactly the artistic gesture of bringing about (a thing). Although for some years already I have written about poiesis and praxis, *Natten* raises new problems for me. I started doubting that maybe I had been looking for the politics (of art) in the wrong place: in practice. And maybe I was mistakenly worried about not finding it there when I – following Arendt and Agamben – had to infer that the practice has changed over time so much that it had eventually got rid of its ancient Greek roots in ethics and politics and ended up in an expression of human free will and creative force. ...In a very simple way, *Natten* appeared to me as a poetic piece, which then forced me to rethink the *poietic*, not praxis this time.

It was a big surprise for me, since I've known Spångberg's work for several years and his *Spangbergianism* and to an extent his early performance, *Powered by Emotion* as well were for me clear examples of cynicism. I understand it as an artistic approach that acknowledges the conditions in which we live and work, but instead of revolutionising them – or leaving the brutal and dirty battlefield – it opts for a continuing operating therein while finding satisfaction in showing, from a meta-level of observation, the awareness of the deep shit in which we live and work. Isn't that what Spångberg was known for? Appreciated or hated, or sometimes both?

Already before seeing *Natten* a blurred impression of poetry crossed my mind while watching *La Substance, but in English* and *Internet*. But *Natten* took it much further. There is cynicism neither in the book nor in the performance. They are smart and do play with our conceptions and preconceptions of the unknown, darkness, fear, horror, nothingness, namelessness, and something that could be intuited as the precarious ontology of existence, but at the same time the book and the performance submerge themselves in these (pre-)conceptions and explore them from under the surface. I cannot say how sincere the performance and the book are, but what I see is that at the place of meta-discourse there is this message: *This page is not available*. In that way, *Natten* becomes a disturbing, vague, and fragile agency of becoming, of bringing to being, from nonbeing to the light of presence. It could well be the light of Caravaggio's night. That is the meaning of poiesis as 'pro-duction', which Agamben stressed when questioning the separation between technical production and artistic creation. However, if we would follow Aristotle and to certain degree Agamben as well, we would need to introduce hylomorphism into poietic activity, which implies the deliberate agency of pro-duction. The agent of hylomorphic poiesis is deliberate, stable, and capable of planning and controlling the chaos of the process, since she projects the image in her head onto the thing she is to create, while shaping a material, giving it a shape that materialises the mental image. On the other hand, a poiesis that is not or refrains from being hylomorphic lets something unknown, nameless, new, pass from nonbeing to being. Can we accept that speculation? While joggling with these thoughts, I've noticed that *Natten* forced me to think poiesis beyond Aristotle, Arendt, and Agamben. I cannot guarantee that there is no image in the head of the mastermind behind this whole event, but nevertheless I cannot discern that from the performance itself. It simply looks uncertain, like a world opened for existence, or, from another

side, like coming from the source where the demarcation line between the nature and human is conceptual, rather than ontological. For a moment, it brings poiesis back to a pre-Aristotelian postulate – maybe Plato's, that *any cause that brings into existence something that was not there before* – which doesn't distinguish the way nature creates from the way self-conscious human do. But *Natten* is not created by nature. It is a purely human creation, the one where – thanks to the conceptual differentiation between the nature and the human – creativity could be discussed, examined, and (re)claimed, without being individually possessed. As an artistic gesture of reclaiming creativity in a society where it is degraded to the means of capitalist production, Spångberg's choreography goes beyond the paradigms of mimetic theatre, modern dance, and even conceptual dance. Therein the image behind the thing is so well thought and, in successful cases, appears so intelligibly in the work, that the thing gets a name before even becoming. *Natten*, on the contrary, does not immediately unify itself with its shadow, nor does it strive to dissolve its contradictions just because they bring confusion and anxiety.

Again, making a long leap, I would associate Spångberg's choreographic gesture with the experience of the uncertainty of life we live now – in Europe at least – after the period of modernity and postmodernity where society and life attempted to be 'well tailored'. Today, in order to learn how to live – or even simply survive – we must get rid of that phantasm; we must endure contradictions and face the horrifying uncertainty of existence. Alone and together. I wouldn't say that I exaggerate (too much) when I claim that while attending *Natten* I experienced the historicity of the current moment. The moment happening on the verge of language. The moment that doesn't resemble European 1930s but 2030s. On that ground, speaking now from within the field of performing arts, I see *Natten* as a proposition for the choreography of the moment in which we live. A new proposition, which we experience as familiar because we live it every day, but for which we still lack words. And how indeed to find the words to inscribe *Natten* into history, yet let it bounce around? I don't know, but I nevertheless tried.

# FROM CYNICISM TO POETICS: A Conversation with Mårten Spångberg

**Ana Vujanović :** The Critical Practice publication *A Problematic Book* deals with the notion of the problem in critical thinking or art making. Knowing your work in dance and choreography for several years and comparing your recent performances with what you did previously, I noticed an interesting move from a generally cynical approach to a poetical approach. Does it make sense to you? You can go broader, but I am thinking mostly about your approach in, on the one hand *Spangbergianism* and to an extent in *Powered by Emotion* and, on the other, recent performances like *La Substance*, *but in English*, *The Internet* and *Natten*.

**Mårten Spångberg :** I think you approach something interesting here, something that also concerns me in the artistic work that I do but also in teaching, writing and in respect of life. I was never interested in cynicism as an approach but ended up there perhaps mostly because of a sense of despair, as in *Spangbergianism*, and earlier more in respect of a—how can I say— post-structuralist resignation in front of the decline, or relativisation, of value; the artistic act as always appropriated, subjectivity as show off rather than authenticity, and so on. For example, *Powered by Emotion* is a solo, appropriating dances from a film with Steve Paxton and, in a similar attitude, singing songs by Buena Vista Social Club. Totally cynical, in a way, but of course the piece I made was a kind of meditation around notions of coding and decoding, territory and deterritorialisation *vis a vis* capitalism. It goes without saying that those ideas again were hijacked from *Mille Plateaux*.

Concerning *Spangbergiansim*, a book that attacks everything and everybody in dance and its business, the over-the-top cynical approach was also a means to annihilate myself. The cynicism in that book was supposed to be so, (an embarrassing word), “badass” that I, the author, should come out as the most ridiculous, to degrade myself to the extent that whatever that book produced, with a sort of machine gun attitude, it could never be understood as “good” advice. The title’s megalomaniac tone was of course also deliberate, both in the sense of “I am God” LOL, but also that I wrote this book, and I’m gonna be around whatever argument you want to have, fistfight included.

At that time, 2010 or so, during the recession, dance, from the perspective of the makers and doers, were so obedient, nice, polite, sympathetic and nobody dared to have any opinion at all – same now obviously – that I felt that I could not write that book at least to shake the dormant climate that I lived in, and felt despair from being part of. I didn't leave, but wrote a book. This is getting long but one more thing, it is important for me that *Spangbegianism* was distributed for free and had no publisher etc. To put together such a book for the bookstore, impossible as at that moment, cynicism becomes high on itself or whatever.

Cynicism is not something that I have researched and I guess it's evident that I cannot take much more than a page or two by Sloterdijk. Then again there are quite some interesting approaches to cynicism historically, even though perhaps I'm more drawn to a kind of pessimism, Schopenhauer definitely. I consider two approaches to cynicism, a structural and a strategic. The first one implies to detect circumstances, structures, and go around them. It is totally cynical to start with analysis of, for example, a commission, instead of with desire or spontaneous happiness. First we see how bad everything is, which it always is – cynical – but based on this initial passive aggressive attitude let's now turn it all around and figure out how the cynical vantage point can open up for happiness that will not backfire, isn't sustainable and, more importantly, is a happiness that we have enabled and not bumped into. In other words this is a cynicism that insists on becoming king of your circumstances, which also offers a kind of transparency. We know what we are doing and we are attackable, no one to blame. This, though, is an approach or attitude that can be experienced as threatening because, as much as it makes my operation transparent, also potentially exposes the operation of the structure inviting, or whatever it is. Strategic cynicism is more or less the contrary, in other words, we should just mention that, formally speaking, structures are always stable and open whereas strategies are malleable and/or closed; so, when structures proposes a certain openness, transparency that in its turn gives way to the possibility of change and re-distribution of power, as an example, then strategic cynicism does the opposite, it basically enables power and closes down the possibility for discussion, opposition, etc. So strategic cynicism is the instrument for the declining dominant discourse, thus the obvious strategy of today's male patriarch threatened as he is by more or less everything and knows it. Then again, such positioning can also from time to time be gainful, if the point is to make yourself into a fool, and that again is complicated because as dominant discourse you make yourself a fool on your own territory, perhaps the worst of the worst cynicism.

**AV :** It suggests that cynicism is also about not taking the position of “the undercommons” – to use the term from Harney and Moten – because it would mean leaving the stage, the battlefield, or disappearing somewhere else. So cynicism is still



about taking the challenge and trying to work with the circumstances as they are, and then maybe twist them. Can we say that?

**MS :** I don't particularly support the notion of undercommons, in particular in respect of the European political landscape. Considering say minorities in the US or people living in the border zone between Mexico and the USA, perhaps we can talk about an undercommons, but the way that Moten and Harney do, it's again a position taken by the one that can afford it. I find Harney seriously cynical and not in an inspiring way. To me, the undercommons becomes a new chill territory full of exciting vectors that scholars can appropriate. Ouch. What's the next book then dealing with the super undercommons, or the naked commons with an accent on Agamben – zoe commons. Endless regress. I think this hints towards a shift, towards a poetic attitude, in the sense of a very different search or journey, which doesn't go from commons to under, to super-under – which is all a matter of staying in a discourse and operating through likelihood. A poetic, and poetic needs to be clarified as it has very little to do with poetry, instead remains and takes as it responsibility to set in motion the possibility for a different kind of change, a difference in kind instead of difference in degree. In other words, it esteems the possibility for contingent change, that obviously therefore also contingently undermines itself as discourse and power. The cynics stay on the scene pretending it's a different one, where the poetic stays around producing the possibilities for the stage to prominently change and contingently. That is to say, cynical transformation is always and harnessed in re-active transformation, whereas poetic approaches engage in the emergence of possible active change.

**AV :** If you think these two approaches in historical categories, what would be, in your view, the cases – authors, artworks, artistic practices – that exemplify them or probe them?

**MS :** There was something, I refer not least to conversations with Valeria Graziano here, wonderfully naïve with the avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both the political and artistic avant-garde. It is somehow beautiful to remember those men that with a heroic gesture considered the possibility of enlightening the ordinary citizen that they were worth fighting for, that emancipation was within reach. Avant-garde was not cynical, it was naïve; kind of cute that a bunch of white men already inscribed in the dominant discourse would bring emancipation to the people. What beautiful heroism. When the plug was pulled any form of avant-garde became impossible, around 1970. What moved in instead was really, terribly cynical, and has become more and more so. I'm talking about institutional critique which I think was a terrible idea, exactly because it is something that can only be practiced by those who

are already invited, the ones that carry the key to the VIP space. Institutional critique was reserved for people like me, white guys from the west. Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Tino Sehgal, it's only Andrea Fraser that contested the male empire. Obviously institutional critique was never a critique of institutions. It was just a tease, playing hard to get, or like kids testing boundaries, but of course always making sure that Mama's gonna love her little boy. Institutional critique suffered from the same problem as Chantal Mouffe's concept of agonism. All great but there is just that problem: one can only have an encounter with someone that has access to a political context, the ones that already have a voice, have been acknowledged by a majority. To me institutional critique can be an example for the worst kind of cynicism, one that it took me long to detect but also kind of nice, you know, things you learn late in life.

**AV :** And actually, it can function only within the system that presupposes it, that's the problem...

**MS :** Exactly. Nevertheless, I think Mouffe made some impact even though it backfired. A few years ago, a curator of a major European museum told me that they don't curate artists anymore but "urgencies". I nodded my head as one does just before some panel discussion got going and we all sat down, but I was thinking, urgent for whom? Under what circumstances? When and where? Urgency is one of those horrid terms that boils down to urgent in respect of the one with the wallet, the museum or whatever it is. Always urgent enough, never more than that because obviously what the museum can recognise is already not urgent for real.

I don't really know, but there is something pressing about this also concerning cynicism and poetics. I think poetics can live with it but cynicism can't for sure. If we want change, prominent change, it has consequences, collateral damage, so to say. Something's gotta go; with the introduction of something new something else will be pushed aside, a new currency will make other things incompatible. One has to recognise, in other words, that radicalism comes with a price, and there can thus not be gentle radicalism, or radicalism with a nice face, to paraphrase Žižek. It just doesn't happen. Liberalism and cynicism used as a smoke screen for one's liberal affinities, cannot handle radicalism for two reasons. First because capitalism requires radicalism and the liberal cannot sign up, and because secondly, the liberal cynic cannot live with the possibility that the ground, the foundation, is not stable. The liberal and the cynic argue, change, by all means, but only as long as it builds properly on the past and maintains the historical narrative as we know it. To approach something with a radical attitude implies to undo givens and to insist on not judging, only then can something emerge contingently.

**AV :** Speaking about radicalism and the price to be paid, I would like to go back to *Spangberianism*... While observing the life of the book, I think it made many people

angry – probably mostly people who hold certain positions that defined the art world in which you operated – but at the same time you got many “admirers”, or many people who sympathise with you, especially among younger artists, students, or the people coming from very marginal contexts, like the Balkans. You have always been very welcomed in that context, probably because it has been very marginalised...

**MS :** I've always been welcome by people who have no money. I'm totally a favorite for the ones without means, but those are also the ones that invent new kinds of resources and turn stuff around. Those are the ones that have no choice but to use first instance, or structural, cynicism. We are fucked so let's go to work. Or, we are totally fucked anyway so let's make sure we are fucked well.

People who are privileged can afford to be greedy, and as soon as somebody that is not already authorised has a good idea, they get scared and feel threatened. It's not exactly news, but the situated tend to wish to sit on their resources. Sit on them until bitterness hits hard and they have to realise that they are just another sad rerun on a channel with three digits. In less situated parts of the dance world there's simply nothing to be snobbish about, so let's get down to basics and then we talk. No need for politeness and fancy ornamentation, but to be a true friend also means to say no, to understand but not agree.

*Spangbergianism* was put together like an evil omen, it was a matter of nailing everybody and let them, including myself, taste their spineless lack of conviction and desire to lean against convenient life. Where is your devotion? Because, if you're not in dance because of devotion what are you doing here? It's badly paid, no fame, bad parties, small cars, cheap wine and flights. So, and here comes cynicism, you are here because you're not good enough for anywhere else.

So guess who got mad and don't invite me any more. Exactly, the ones that stash the money in the mattress, including Sweden. All the rest have been hands in the air. It's pretty cute with Sweden, the book has been read by many, but the Swedish arts council or anybody that's an authority in dance, art or culture up there has never mentioned the book. Pretty sick considering that it's read from—and I'm serious—Argentina and Mexico, to Korea and Japan and back again, the whole of Europe, including the US and Canada. It's pretty comical to have written the most read book in dance in this century and my own context totally ignores it.

Yet, however cynical it was, it was also, at least, meant to be an unconditionally positive statement, around self-empowerment, autonomy and the will to create one's own circumstances. Shit – I know it's tacky, but – *Spangbergianism* was a just call for independence, and mind you, it worked.

You know, it's what I like best, to prove people wrong. Kind of like, you didn't believe in us, in what we did, what we were devoted to. Now it's too late, so good luck in your comfy chair in your corner office with a freaking glass and please go on complaining about budget cuts. We're out there changing the world in the meantime.

**AV :** Now, when you are explaining the cynicism you practiced in *Spangbergianism*, I think that in fact “problematizing” is something most characteristic for your work, although it takes different shapes. So to speak, in *Spangbergianism* you formulate the problem from a *cynical approach*, while now, you are trying more and more to formulate it from a *poetical approach*. But in both cases it is about problematising and also attempting to formulate problems. What would you say about that?

**MS :** As I mentioned, that book was written out of despair, a sense of being unable to continue. But at the same time to give up is not an option. I don’t mean to reference Beckett, obviously, but never the less in this inability to stop, I think there is passion. It is exactly devotion that doesn’t allow me to stop. But devotion must always be contested and double checked, otherwise one risks becoming coquettish. Devotion is always on the move. To me, the price to pay for love, for devotion, is that I must always be, in a way, out of balance. Love implies to insists on always living a moment of constant *ungrounding*. Concerning love and art, my, *our*, responsibility is to never regulate or to stabilise, to never make something consolidate but instead generate openness to an ongoing process in which the self, my self is perpetually undermined.

**AV :** But where does that whole attitude come from? You know, it is unusual. That’s why maybe you are a very good person to speak with about “the problem”, since it’s not typical that artists, theorists, etc., in the contemporary European dance scene problematise that much, and you do it all the time...

**MS :** If you, in your social context of Serbia and former Yugoslavia, started to problematise because of necessity, I did it because if I didn’t what would that make me? I’d turn into an obedient surfer that would have difficulties having a look in the mirror. To problematise—if that’s what I do—was my answer to growing up and working in a privileged context. Growing up in, and I definitely did, a social democracy—and Swedish welfare was absolutely wonderful—but the political climate I grew up in was extremely effective at sedating the people. At some point I figured out that I had to stay alert, always alert, and the way to do it was to problematise.

It’s perhaps valuable to say that to problematize is not the same thing as having problems or solve something like a problem.

In fact, behind it all is probably a personal trauma. That’s the first – you don’t want to know but yes, I’m strongly revenge driven. The second is that devotion keeps me from getting bitter, which would be easy after such a long time in the business. Nothing in the world has been so violent to me as dance and art. Nothing has broken me more and nowhere I have I encountered more evil people. Cynicism is one obvious solution, but it’s way too lonely for me.

It’s also something about refusing to be world-champion in Stockholm. I left in the



mid '90s partly because I couldn't stand the self-pleasedness of choreographers making a little quintet spending quarter of a million euro. It's really easy to be the champ in Stockholm, better to not be interested in the rest of the world, or tour, because we might just have to realise that what we do is not interesting, original, exciting, cool, smart, theoretically advanced, you name it. The only thing extraordinary with Swedish dance is that it's Swedish.

Finally, you know, I've always been bad at everything. I have no degrees in nothing. I can't dance, I'm a lousy musician, mediocre philosopher and all kinds of things, but it's great because I have nothing to fall on, I have nothing to defend. Cynical in the first instance, but at a second glance, perfect: I can do what I want.

**AV :** Do you know of the term “dilettante” by Brecht? And in former Yugoslavia Aldo Milohnić wrote about “radical dilettantism”... It suggests that if you are outside the paradigm, then you can ask the fundamental questions about the paradigm, just because you are not complicit with all the tacit knowledge and rules that you get through official education or by being professional in the field. It's a kind of position that cannot be complicit with the *doxa*, that is in a way free from it.

**MS :** Absolutely. A colleague, an architect, he has five years of education that he could not not defend. Not because he loves architects but because “I spent five years learning that shit”. The piece that you mentioned in the beginning of our conversation *Powered by Emotion* was quite explicitly addressing dilettantism, radical or not, and indeed as you mention the dilettante, so to say, carries with him or her the possibility to reveal. Like the child and the emperors new outfit. There's just a little problem. At the same time as the educated is blinded by his debt he has something to sustain a practice. The dilettante is “free” but can easily sink into the mud of sensationalism. It's a bit embarrassing to build a practice on revealing emperors, and the tendency is that it ends up in the dirtiest form of cynicism. I'm thinking Maurizio Cattelan. The recent toilet in gold installed in the Guggenheim entitled *America*, give me a break.

There was something very important working in close proximity to architecture, especially with this extraordinary man Tor Lindstrand. It taught me a lot about differentiating between structures and strategies; reading circumstances and understanding protocols, briefs etc., and differentiating organisation from expression. The educated is somebody whose practice is embedded in structure, but this can establish a strong causality in relation to expression, and this blocks “wild” navigation. On the other hand, the dilettante is somebody that can maneuver like a crazy person, or be super strategic, exactly because of structurelessness, but the back is that he has nothing to push against, nothing to produce a generative resistance. Good art, if you know what I mean, happens when the delicate boarder zones between structures and strategies start

to vibrate and as a result crack open the dichotomy between striation and smoothness. It is there, which is not a where, that problems show up, where “New” problems emerge.

**AV :** I have a straightforward question, to which the answer probably cannot be straightforward, but nevertheless... Since we have agreed so far that the problem is not about complaining or being indecisive etc., I’m interested in how you theoretically or philosophically understand the activity of problematisation and the notion of the problem. It is a standstill in the regular flow of action, a moment of resistance, of zooming out, so to speak, no? How would you reference these notions?

**MS :** “Problematisé” as you said, to me has to do with a sympathetic relation to Deleuze & Guattari that I, as a “true” dilettante, obviously never read. I think that the work of the philosopher, scientist and artist fundamentally is to make truth, make fact and make new kinds of experiences show up, rather than consolidate what we already know. An important sentence from *What Is Philosophy* comes to mind. From the top of my head: the responsibility of the philosopher, the scientist and the artist is the production of the possibility of an altogether new something.” Western philosophy, largely Kantian philosophy, certainly is work of excellence: the philosopher clears all the debris and all the mess away, and here is the concept, the truth, what cannot be otherwise. Deleuze & Guattari rather work in the middle of the mess, as a means to generate other kinds of order. Instead of philosophy that consolidates truth or a science that proves this or that fact. This is a productive or generative philosophy. It’s not a matter of consolidation of truth, fact and experience but instead a matter of generating truth, generating fact and in the case of art generating new kinds of experience.

For Deleuze the “tool” used, or that he recommends, as we know is called a concept, but concept is a complex term not least in respect of its etymology. In Deleuze it is rather difficult to get what he means with a concept as it fluctuates from book to book.

The understanding of “concept” in English comes to a large extent from the translation of Kant’s *Critiques* into English. When those translations were made, the German word *Begriff* could not really be translated to “term” or “notion”. Finally the translator decided for “concept” – can’t remember his name but Mario Perniola writes nicely about it in “Enigmas” – and this totally transformed the entire ideas of concept. *Begriff* as we know is a settlement, it’s about nailing something. The fundamental *Begriffe* of a thesis, for example, should carry the same meaning from the beginning to the end – stability, consolidation, determination and in no way confusion.

The Deleuzian concept is altogether different; it’s instead a machine for the production of indeterminacy. A concept in Deleuze is not a consolidation, a

clearing of the grounds, but instead a machine, an abstract machine that generate some thing, very different from conventional machines. A toaster, for example, is a machine that is successful, or good, when containing strong determinacy. Every toast should come out the same, that's the point. We can also understand a conventional machine through established modes of causality. This leads to that, and so on. The Deleuzian concept is an abstract machine producing indeterminacy, and being in itself indeterminate, one could even say singular and singularity obviously don't have determination.

Deleuze opens up for an alternative etymology, a Latin background where concept rather refers to conceiving something, *concipere* would be the Latin origin.

Concept here instead means bringing together, but to conceive is not just to bring together as in collecting a bunch of sheep. It's a matter of bringing together and forth. In ways it refers to drafting something, in particular in the sense that it is a bringing together of things, of stuff, of thought that is incompatible. To bring forth as an assemblage what appeared to be incompatible. To work with or on a concept therefore means not only to bring together incompatibles, but for this to happen we, the one engaged, need to change his or her understanding of what grouping, assembling can be, and contingently. What follows is a question from where then do these capacities "come"? Bringing something together that is epistemologically not possible to bring together?

What Deleuze is interested in is not knowledge but rather the indeterminate stuff that leaks out of the virtual, the immanence or a plane of consistency. What leaks out, if one can use such a metaphor, is not knowledge but the stuff knowledge is made of.

But why all this Deleuze mumbo jumbo? Deleuze might be arrogant and "French" but his philosophy is never cynical. Instead, to me, his thinking resonates strongly with the Greek notion *poiesis* that we encounter in Plato's *Symposium*. Summarised by Agamben in *The Man Without Content* (translated to English on in 1999 but published 1970), he differentiates between production – which is to make another one – and production as manufacturing.

**AV :** Technical reproduction.

**MS :** Exactly, which obviously can also be to bake bread, make children or whatever. Wait a second, children is a bit complex, maybe. Next to production then, *poiesis* which instead, proposes Agamben, would be "pro-duction", a matter of bringing some thing forth, previously unthinkable. This has nothing good or bad which is always something, but instead of bringing forth *some thing*. Production is a matter of organising another one (something) for the world, perhaps an alternative or version, and this production is based on knowledge; it is measurable and effective. *Poesis* (pro-duction) instead, is bringing some thing *New* into the world, such production can not be knowledge based; it is immeasurable

and therefore affective. Not for Agamben, but for Deleuze it is important to add here that production always remains in the real of the possible (reality/the world), whereas pro-duction, *poiesis*, implies an engagement with the possibility of potentiality, and potentiality can be said to stuff that leaks out of the virtual into reality and the domain of possibility, a process that Deleuze, referring to Simondon, define as actualisation.

**AV :** Agamben wrote on *poiesis* of today, but he relies a lot on Aristotle. When I said “the poetics” at the beginning of this conversation, I also had in mind that classical idea of bringing something new, to appear in the world. But then, if we think about poetics in your case, like in many other cases, we don’t need to speak about bringing matter into a shape, but bringing together matter and shape. That’s why the works like *Natten* (premiered at Kunsten Festival 2016) are so intriguing and make us think or speculate. And it seems fruitful for me to go beyond Agamben and Aristotle, and think about just bringing something into the world, you know, without having that preconceived image that you project on to the thing that you bring. That’s also a relatively open poetical proposal. But why I think poetics is still about problematising things or even criticising – just a different approach to the problem – is that when you propose something, when you bring something new, you also put it in the world, in place of something else. That kind of proposition could be also an implicit criticism or deliberately filling the world with the things that you think are worth filling it. This open possibility of the thing that you bring into the world might resonate with what you have done recently, hm?

**MS :** Certainly. I’m just thinking along with Agamben and I sympathise with his historical analyses that’s obviously intimate with Aristotle but perhaps more in bed with Heidegger.

Over the last many years we’ve had a lot of debates around critique, its possible decline, resurrection, how capitalism has co-opted it, etc. On the one hand, it’s been argued that criticism fails in scrutinising the position of the critic, making it into a positivist practice. On the other, one can argue against criticality, that prides itself with a superficial reading of the late Foucault but, as Foucault clearly warn us, ends up in being simple neoliberal opportunism, track-pad criticism. I’ve been, after putting out *Spangbergianism*, not least interested in problematising these positions and locating them specifically in artistic practices, and in dance in particular. In a few words. Critique: not as a means to an end, but as modes of companionship during and through processes. Critique: not in respect of probability and responsibility, but as contingent and irreversible, which implies practices whose outcome, revenue, is indeterminate and therefore not subject to interpretation, but instead offers the implicated to engage generatively or in processes of possible pro-duction, poietic production. It of course goes without saying that this pro-duction, the bringing forth is also indeterminate to, and for,



me. In this way I cannot know what to fill the world with, I can only “hope” that it can be filled with something else, something *Else*. And as you say, the bringing forth implies to put something in the world instead of something else. *Poiesis* comes with a price, collateral damage.

It's thus pretty comical how liberal people deal with *poiesis*, especially liberals in academia and the arts that tend towards a more classical value conservative liberalism. At the end of the day I want my work, *Natten* for example, to be minimally guiding. We are guided enough in life, directed and etc., by the state, the economy etc. We are placed in front of pre-fabricated choices – sushi or sashimi – which is choice as production. I've had it. My shows are there exactly for the possibility of *poiesis*. Things are there but no matter and form are brought together, no manual is passed out. Respect, every audience member can decide for themselves, the ones that decide to walk out probably have something better in mind and I'm not up for being convincing. My dances, my work since at least *La Substance*, but in *English* is not conceptual, they are concepts, passed on to not the audience, but to each spectator individually, each individual understood as a singularity.

**AV :** Would that be what differentiates it from cynicism? That of unleashing the guidance? Withdrawal of the “master-mind”?

**MS :** I am thinking that the cynical is somebody who detects anomalies and attacks them, but always contained in the discourse through which the anomaly has been able to appear. What I am interested in, and about what poetics can do, is rather to break with discourses. Poetics is not strategic in this sense, it's in a way, hope for the best, it's outcome is contingent, what the collateral damage is, who knows, it can even be the obliteration of the artist or the work, or the world.

*Natten* is a through and through a critical work, but it's poetic in a way, detecting anomalies and replacing them, not with something that we know but rather replacing it with something. In this respect, the move is also a matter of making my position unstable, ungrounding my position. The *poietic* moment necessitates a departure from subjectivity, from identity, and implies a sense of trans-subjectivity. In a way, poetics is always a matter of *queering*, not bring matter and form together.

The cynic makes sure he comes out on top. Like Jérôme Bel's performances. They know what they are talking about, attack this something and turn to the audience to make sure everybody gets what is attacked. Here we have the audience and everybody in the audience, a good multiplicity, go home to their husbands, colleagues, neighbours, dogs and cat telling them how amazing it was. “He is so spot on, so clever, so intelligent”, and everybody agrees. Effective and completely stupefying.

Then, for us, scholars, etc. we are very happy in the foyer afterwards, because we understand everything and can apply it to loads of sexy theories. Because of this, Jérôme Bel can be successful, it's very economical. The investment to write about Jérôme Bel is very small, because it doesn't contest mine or anybody's relation to Lacan or whatever. Right?

**AV :** Maybe it's because it's in a way prepared to be written about.

**MS :** Exactly, which I think was very important at some point, but not today. I mean, especially when being prominently situated in every kind of privilege. I instead vote for practices of ungrounding, myself in particular, especially in respect of our current political situation. If we experience – this is the brief version – omni-present capitalism, any proposal or statement, any criticism must be a capitalist ditto. So rather than stating something – in the sense of Kant and *Begriff* – I'm interested in withdrawal, which is not just any kind of withdrawal, but that's for another day – withdrawal from coagulating form or tying it to matter. This is also what the performance passes to the audience, a kind of minimally active withdrawal that never becomes anything before the individual steps in, makes a move, generates.

Conventionally the audience is understood as a multiplicity. Not good, and we read this with Rancière and beyond, hopefully with Lyotard, etc. I want it the other way around; there must be no audience, only individuals: a specific kind of multitude – a set of individuals that cannot be brought together as group. There is no community here, if there is one it is one that we as individuals that don't belong to each other have to bring forth.

This mess is coming together. In front of a performance that offers itself as a concept, the individual audience member is possibly engaged in a process of coagulating, poietically, some things that are neither form nor matter. It is in this twining of withdrawal and individual (singular) coagulation or capture, or not coagulating but just being, of minimally formed and mattered, that the work is located. It is, to me, at this moment that something can show up.

After *Natten* people often come out after the show, it's 7 hours and 6 minutes, saying things like: "Not now" or something else like "Gotta go" and it seems it's because the experience, the twining is simultaneously too big and too weak, too personal and too generic. I like that.

**AV :** That is maybe the moment of creating the problem. At the end I would like to return once again to the problem of "the problem", and ask you about the role or the function of the problem in your thinking and creative process. Not every problem has the same strength and potentiality...

**MS :** Basically there are two kinds of problems. There are false problems, like: should you or should I pick up the kids from the kindergarten? I did it yesterday, you do it today, or we could hire somebody to do it. There are a number of solutions already available... not really a problem just negotiation and rhetorics. A real problem – this is, by the way, kind of picked up from Deleuze’s book on Bergson. Real problems are problems to which there is no available solutions, they cannot be solved. Real problems are problems that “force” us to generate solutions, but again from where, or out of what, then these solutions are generated because if they were generated out of language, or through probability analysis, for example, they would indeed be conventional – a false problem. A real problem can generate solutions only through an encounter with the virtual, so to say, forcing a leakage out the virtual, immanence or whatever we choose for the real of the potential. Real problems are what one, or that’s what I, cannot not engage with, when making art.

Thinking about this, I consider that art obviously isn’t here to make the world, our lives or anything, better. That’s design or simple economy that surrounds art extensively but is not synonymous with aesthetic experience. I rather think – and that’s definitely not me thinking but general Kant – but I do think that art’s job, or responsibility, is to make the world, modes of life, phenomena and things come to an end. Like Duchamp made sculpture come to an end around 1913 or so, and how Andy Warhol made originality, in a way, come to an end, or *Finnegans Wake*, Ornette Coleman’s *Free Jazz*, Gerhard Richter’s out of focus paintings and so on. They all made something come to an end. After Duchamp, sculpture wasn’t the same any more, he brought sculpture to an end, not as simply destruction but so that new positions of sculpture had to be articulated or take place, but it was not Duchamp who did, or was responsible for, this articulation. He was only responsible for the to-an-end, and contingently. With this in mind, the engagement with problems and to problematise is not a matter of articulating questions to which there might or might not exist solutions, but instead to provoke new answers, answers to which there are no questions. The poietic moment is one that generates answers to which we have to articulate accurate questions.

What I want, or what I think, art should pass on to the audience is the necessity to articulate a new question. For me, there is something about the difference between a modernist project and what I am interested in. Modernism was equipped with a shovel. If you just dig deep enough, then we would find essence and if we could find it we could have or gain consolidation. Capture essence. This was wishful thinking.

In accord with Deleuzian generative philosophy, I am thinking that my job is to engage in the production of the possibility for essence to show up, like from the future, in a way. What I am doing, what art’s job is, is to make new answers

come to us from the future. Those answers, that are New, that are essential and must be, are obviously true, but only until the moment they have engaged in the process that we know as actualisation, which is the moment when they, so to say, enter representation, and be proxy become conventional. In other words, generating truth in order for it to vanish, and that's important because if truth would remain, life and stuff would not be better or worse, not come to an end, but simply freeze in a moment of eternity.

So my job as a person, and especially as somebody engaging with art, in production or audience, is to be alert, because those answers are not telling us when they are coming. When they arrive from the future, and this is embarrassing – I can't fucking believe I'm saying this but I also believe in the soul – okay, they come from a non-causal, non-regional opportunity and are prominently horizontal. In other words, they arrive from immanence. This is why I cannot stop making art, to engage in the possibility of the production of new answers. Answers that carry with them the possibility of contingent worlds. To engage in problems is to engage in the destruction of what is and through this destruction bring something forth. To leave cynicism behind and be courageous enough to open up for the absolute dread unleashed by *poiesis*.

Vienna, 16 August 2016





## MARTEN SPANGBERG « DO THEY THINK THE LENGTHS OF THE PIECES ARE AN ACCIDENT?»

*Guillaume Rouleau – MA Culture*

Swedish « performance related artist » Mårten Spångberg, besides animating four workshops with Asad Raza and Adrian Villar Rojas, has presented three performances during ImPulsTanz – International Vienna Dance Festival 2016 : *Dawn*, created in collaboration with students of P.A.R.T.S. (dance and research center founded by Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker), *La Substance, but in English* (2015) and *Natten* (2016). If *Dawn*, played for the first time at the Odeon theatre, was a choreography inspired by the solar phenomenon (sunset and sunrise) and by a 75 minutes sample of Drake's song *Hotline Bling*, *La Substance, but in English* and *Natten* were more "rococo". In these two performances, respectively 4h15 and 7h06 long, the relationship between choreography and dance is being rephrased by Mårten Spångberg through a scenographic "mille-feuilles", an acoustic cocktail and a series of gestures introducing other relationship to the audience, other structures of choreography in which you can leave and come back as any time.

In *La Substance, but in English*, the stage set is a gold and silver aluminum patchwork of fabrics with numerous brand logos (Versace, Chanel Paris, etc.); a patchwork of clothes that the eleven performers wear and take off regularly; a patchwork of colors that the public can paint on a large panel, Mårten Spångberg leaning against it, his iMac on his knees, his Iphone within easy reach, connected to the soundsystem of the Kasino am Schwarzenbergerplatz where *La Substance, but in English* was performed. A polysemous title combining French and English which evokes the philosophical notion of substrate (the essence of things), and at the same time the narcotics which are presents on stage through golden cannabis leaves attached

to bamboo stakes and through different liquids (weed in two horizontal glass tubes), bottles of soda and candies scattered all over the stage, thrown into the public. The substance is gradually spread out over several hours. As the French philosopher Tristan Garcia underlines in *A first fragment for Marten*, cotemporary experiences are governed by the notion of intensity: an intensity (sexual, gustative, cosmetic advertising – Dior Homme Intense – etc.) that questions the human experiences (as opposed to the intensity in physics), about what is subsisting and what is changing in those experiences and with which strength. The abundance of signals in *La Substance, but in English* are for Mårten Spångberg a way to generate unpredictable situations within established structures: the one of capitalism and the one of choreography (which Mårten Spångberg dissociates from the dance); An intensity, which in *La Substance* is associated to pleasure enjoyment and coolness.

The intensity of the experience is also found in *Natten*, the Swedish word for overnight, where it stands for an extremely intense fearful night, a night during which we could experience the “nothing”. *Natten* is an artificial overnight displayed composed by Spangberg in order to generate a nothing that cannot be named, which disrupts our experience as a spectator. *Natten*, at the MUMOK Hofstallungen, began with the crossing of curtains; two black curtains who seemed to cut this part of the old imperial stable (with its ceiling painted by Otto Zitko) from the rest of Vienna. We enter, without any dawn phenomenon, into the night – into a brown, dark green, silver cavern –walking along the walls of the room, the blankets that cover the floor attenuate the noise of our steps, piles of *Natten* books by Marten Spangberg are all around (*Natten*, Mårten Spångberg, 2016). At the far end of space, white and black clouds are projected in a continuous loop on the wall. Aluminum canvas are hanging from the ceiling. As in *La Substance, but in English*, Mårten Spångberg is leaning against a the wall, selecting the songs sporadically played, this time it is *New Dawn Fades* by Joy Division and *In the Event of a Sudden Loss* by Greg Haines we hear, instead of *Diamonds* by Rihanna and *Lush Life* by Zara Larsson; as in *La Substance, but in English*, phases of silence, of resting, of easy going interfere; but there is no glamour in *Natten*. *Natten* is about the dark part of our thinking, a point of non-understanding. “A Journey to the End of the Night” (Céline) with Mårten Spångberg and ten performers as our guides. I met Mårten Spångberg at the Café Liebling in Vienna to discuss *La Substance* and *Natten* (and to a lesser extent about *Dawn*) that put the cursor of the intensity on undetermined, but also to talk about Jérôme Bel, *World of Warcraft*, Cédric Price, *Harry Potter* and Kieślowski.

**It is the Austrian premiere for *La Substance, but in English* a 2014 piece and *Natten* a 2016 piece. Did you adapt any aspects for the Kasino am Schwarzenbergplatz where *La Substance, but in English* has been played and for the MUMOK where *Natten* has been played?**

No. (laughs) I’m very familiar with both spaces and even if the pieces that I do are very constructed but of course there are adaptations, especially with *Natten*, now it is in a place that is 30 meters long and 12 meters wide whereas a couple of weeks ago we did it in a room that was 17×17. I think about the work like this. It is this piece. It is very much like a theatre performance in that respect, but I also think about my work more like a visual artist in the

sense that *Natten* can have many variations in the sense that like when an artist makes an exhibition for the Pompidou Center then they have a lot of space, then next time they do it in some Kunsthalle in Aubervilliers, then of course they have a smaller space and they will look at the audience to know how are they. So it is two different exhibitions but it may even have the same name. I'm interested in thinking that there are versions. You cannot work when you exchange a text with a friend, then you send the PDF and then after a couple of days you have written more about it and send another PDF, so there are versions that are more or less calculated. And this is not a matter of adapting to the situation, there is a little bit of that, but it is rather to undermine, so (you have) at least two perspectives at the same time, the understanding of something completed.

If you write for a webpage, this is a different form of publication than the writer of a newspaper. With the newspaper you're dead, when it is out, it is out, than you have to suffer from it (laughs) whereas the web page, if somebody calls you back and says there's a misspelling or an error, you can always change it. How do we think this in respect of performances? Is it a product but a product can also be transformative. Which is not necessarily that it becomes better and better but well, if we do it in Asia for example than we can't go with the set design because it costs billions and so we maybe have to pick up a new set once we're there but we don't take it back with us because this would be idiotic. Or three performers are in some other job that is better paid, then we do it with a smaller group and so on and so on. So I'm thinking also, in respect of most of the productions, the way that we understand performances and for example say in pieces of some familiar choreographers like Jérôme Bel pieces, they are extremely set, they are factory work. So this piece should be exactly the same for somebody who has it in France, in Germany, in Finland and so on. A BMW 511B is everywhere the same and completely interchangeable. The experience of Jérôme Bel in the Pompidou Center is exactly the same anywhere else. Good bye! This I think is prominently old school and definitely politically unacceptable.

I'm interested in thinking about contemporary business. Instead of starting a factory and having workers there maybe instead we think that the labor that we start is a web magazine but it is also a platform for the possibility of this, and we also do concerts etc. And sometimes this brand is lower than this one, so I'm interested, not in order to become more neoliberal, but I'm interested in thinking and experimenting how can contemporary art product in a particular stage – think about the way contemporary business operate: in a factory, you have a lot of investment to build the machine that builds the car, then a long rehearsal process and then we trade them as a sustainable product. In the performance circulation that we have now (festivals etc.) nobody tours anymore but still people invest eight months in fucking making the show/job. We work for three weeks and then when we tour, we continue to work and if it sells it is great, then we continue to work on it, and if it doesn't sell, because what we did that was fucking out, then, cool, we use that knowledge for something else. Think about a work, when we make an ass, and then we should present it to the audience, this could be overwhelming, instead we spend 25% of the money for to make a pilot or a better version, we test it on different kinds of audiences and then they say yeah! Then we make “1.0” which we know is crappy but it is one we know that we can sell and then we will see what the response

is and then we put in the big money to do the marketing when we know that the thing is selling already.



**You constantly update your performance.**

Yes, I always update the performance! Maybe people don't see it, it is not only how it looks, it is also how it circulates, how we think about the work.

**And you try to have this consciousness from the audience of the constant evolution?**

That doesn't really matter. It is also okay to come in- like a television series, if you come in after three episodes it is also cool- if you don't have a better experience of *World of Warcraft* because you started with the version 1.0 you also get a great game experience and you know that it probably had a history. And if you are a nerd you will investigate in that.

***La Substance, but in English* lasts 4 or 5 hours approximately while *Natten* lasts 7 hours. Why did you choose these formats?**

Precisely 4 hours 20. Usually it is not written and never ends up being exactly the time you indicate, normally it is 4h18 or 4h15 but the arrangement of the performance is 4h20 and it refers to weed smoking. Do you know that the international day of marihuana culture is on the 20th of April? *La Substance* is also all about getting in touch with the real thing, "la substance". So the arrangement also refers to losing track or rationality. And *Natten* is 7 hours



and 6 minutes. *Natten* is a performance about Satan and hell and the fearful basis, the dreadfulness, the darkness, the deeply unknown, the horrendous, anyway, yes, the performance is long.

**And do you consider *La Substance, but in English* and *Natten* like two connected or two independent pieces? While *La Substance* is a great celebration of being together without a cause as mentioned in the booklet by different liquids, tissues, music, *Natten* is a reflection about the night and the enlighten part of the night. So are the two pieces connected for you or two different approaches, the dark side of Martin Spangberg and the bright side? (laughs)**

Exactly! It is all psychological. I went to my shrink and then *La Substance* came out and then *Natten* came out and now I feel that I am ready to make good Jérôme Bel performances again with a long corporation and dynamic (laugh). No, seriously speaking, they have nothing to do with each other but I made them happen. I don't know if I made them but I made them make themselves. You don't need to see them together, they are definitely not like some Kieślowski film, you know. They are not siblings. They don't connect and you don't have to see number one to see number two. At the same time they have in common aesthetic features, not so much in the sense of display but they share an aesthetic landscape. Then I didn't do it deliberately but it is somehow *La Substance* is the beach version of the night. It is in the day and it is colorful and celebratory all over the place and crazy and smiley and you feel the community and togetherness and you can sing along. *Natten* is very withdrawn. It is a performance that you experience very much alone even if there are 200 people in the building. It is a lonely show. Whatever it is that I do, I avoid words or approaches such as interpretation or reflection, but I am rather interested in non-reflexive situations, in a productive situation instead of interpretation, when I interpret something then I localize that something. When I go to the museum and I make an interpretation of this painting then I locate it. It must be 16th century, French, you can see that it is a traditional portrait... under these economic circumstances. We can put it in the layouts of art history, no problem. Interpretation is the matter of making something harmless. Reflection is something that I do from my position. Of course I can interpret everything by saying "it is shit" for example. This is "nothing". It is a matter of dissolving the urge or desire for interpretation in favor of the possibility of an experience to witness. As a spectator I start to produce forms of language.

**Do you follow any method when dissolving anterior forms of performances?**

Yes, but I think you can't do it by deciding. Let's go to the studio and dissolve form. Then we'll bring a toolbox that we'll use for this dissolving but since tools know what they are doing, they also know how they dissolve so they will always dissolve in a reactive kind of way. There need to be other formations that offer a possibility for this dissolving of formation, of form, of reliable and determinable experience.

My job as an artist is to take my job serious. What I do is indeed to identify that I am not a worker, but I engage with praxis of dissolving the available for the possibility of something

else. What artists do is to make the world come to an end, it is not to make it a better place. I don't mean to come to an end as a sort of tsunami or volcano, but to come to an end in the sense of how we can experience the world and what is an experiencing agent. So we're seeing this in the respect of Duchamp for example, what he does with the ready-mades (the bottle and the fountain) is basically that he makes sculpture come to an end.

The moment we recognize the bottle as a sculpture we have completely transformed what a sculpture possibly can be, both after and before Duchamp. So what Duchamp does is to make the world of sculpture come to an end. When we have that experience, we have to reformulate our understanding of sculpture not in respect of what we knew before but in respect of what we only now know about what a sculpture necessarily needs to be. In this respect I can't do this as a worker. Work is something determinable, then there are maybe some side effects, but I'm interested to withdraw from wanting to be a worker. Art must not be qualified for how it works or what work has been introduced to it. Art has to be judged in respect to how it has made something come to an end.

### **And how are you doing this in *La Substance* and in *Natten*?**

I have no idea! (laughs) But to think it in this way: What I do in my studio, in my head or in my office is to do this dissolving practice in a way. When I make the piece that is for example in the Kasino [*La Substance*], I know everything about that piece. Which of course I don't. Every day is different depending on the audience, the weather, my mood. The piece is completely set but it is set in a way that is not there to be in any respect convincing or guiding, nor is it there to be unconvincing or unguiding. It is there to be in difference to the perspective of the individual spectator. It is not there to confirm you as cultural consumer, neither is it interested in being confirmed as a dance performance, it's equally happy. There is no guarantee for anything. But it is constructed as a way of withdrawing from the possibility of being located or positioned. It is there to never become a "one", it is never a conceptual formulation. It is never conceptual at all. In a different way, it is not a matter of making the decision whether you found the performance good or bad; is it sushi or sashimi. The aim of the performance is to provoke the audience for the possibility of the production of a choice, not the taking of a choice (sushi or sashimi) but the production of a choice. There are no criteria available for that production to happen.

### **Could you develop about the display of this experience?**

*La Substance* is a sort of superabundant, superimpulsed incompatibility. There is so much information, so many surfaces and signs and signifiers that basically the viewer will suffocate if he doesn't make a decision him/herself. There are so many stimuli or non-stimuli that most of it just goes besides. And it doesn't matter- we are completely non-focused. It is not like electro shocks, after four of them you will really be kaput. It is a matter of an endless flux of information, and most of it miss it but that's how it needs to be. Cedric Price, the British architect who worked in the AA (architectural association) was more of an educator. He was the architect of the "fun palace" in the 60's. He proposed that the task of the

architect is always the aim to miss, to fail for something. But then in a lecture that he gave in the AA 15 years ago he talked about the relationship to builders and commissioners and he said this sentence: “the task of the architect is the aim to miss”. And, out of the blue, he adds : “...and obviously the zone of the aim to miss is pink”. And there it becomes a little bit complicated, but one way of understanding it is that pink is not a clean colors, it is not signifying strength, it is weak, womanly, definitely not used by any military regime or Coca Cola or convincing brands. So the aim to miss is also the aim to miss oneself in the zone of the undetermined, right? If you want to aim to the undetermined zone you also have to make sure that your aim to miss is also a undetermined aim. That is something that I found interesting to think about.

**It makes me think about your choice of the popish scenography and choreography in *La Substance*. Why did you choose to treat some topics that we just have talked about through pop aesthetics and a very specific kind of pop, a very contemporary one?**

I thought, why is it that dance performances are always so fucking boring? And why is it that the costumes, the hairdos, the makeup and the set design are boring? It is always reduction! Instead of being reductive, when you think about conceptual choreographies, they are all about reduction. Boring! Instead there should be makeup, there should be hairdos, there should be glitter and gold and weeks and and goo and coke diet and Luis Vuitton and all of it at the same time. The understanding of contemporary that the contemporary dance has is a contemporarity that first of all I don't think of as contemporary at all. It is deeply modernist in its understanding, maybe it is deconstructive in its methodology but as expression it is always deeply fucking deep modernism to the extent that they don't even know about it. Jérôme Bel is a post-modernist that dresses up like a modernist and prominently. He wants to be recognized as the artist. He identifies with Andy Warhol as the last one. They love the heroic artist. And what they do is to make an “oeuf” (egg). Fuck that!

**Do we need a lot of props?**

I don't need anything.

**But is the publicity, as the one you use for the scenography of *La Substance*, essential to escape from the boring?**

Not at all! We can use whatever, but this one, *La Substance, but in English* is a performance that wants to be as contemporary as possible in the most conventional way but still not deliver a conventional experience correlated to these conventional codes. But it is absolutely not interested in being special. It should be totally ordinary. However, in combination these ordinaries become perhaps something that doesn't correlate in your comprehension. For example, pop music, except of very rare examples, is used only as semiotic examples or as a way of showing that now it is “party time” on stage. It is a kind of waste in time. I thought for a long time, how could I make this show where there could be pop song after pop song after pop song and people would love it and I would love it. And one of the problems is, if you put

on Rhianna and she sings « Diamonds » or if you put on Donna Summer and she sings « Upside down » then it is a semiotic text situation that you will look for. This reconstitutes the conceptual times of the 90's. Jérôme Bel *The show must go on*, that's what people do on stage, kind of a conceptual tautology. This is not a good idea. And then exactly in *La Substance* there is not pop music played from the stage to the audience, but it is pop music played by a guy who sits in the audience and sings along with Rihanna. So with him singing on top, that is a stronger proposal than the proposal that the semiotics of « Diamonds ». It is stronger that he sings then, be Beyoncé or somebody else, and in this moment, pop could function. I thought: "Why should dance performance always be with music that I don't want to hear at any other moment?". When I go teaching the students, where they warm up, they always have the local pop music. So let's make a show with it! And then I thought if there is pop music there is at least something that the audience can like because everybody definitely loves Rihanna. This is the good thing- where the audience is not there to attend a performance but starts to have a kinesthetic reverberation with the situation. Normally the music in performances is from the stage to the audience, now it is from the audience to the stage. So the man singing in the audience is also a kind of permission for the audience to participate in their fantasy in the show perhaps also with movements.



**Concerning *Natten*, I was wondering about the relationship between the performers and the audience. Is it the same approach with the music, etc.?**

No, *La Substance* is about abundance and *Natten* is about withdrawal which doesn't mean that it has low volume or lights or minimal music, there are a lot of signs. It withdraws so you can never locate it. Of course it is a dance performance in Impulstanz but it also withdraws. If *La Substance* is a play about the abundance of information in favor of the melting of this

information into a kind of substance to which you have to make choices as an individual, *Natten* is a matter of withdrawal into the “unknown unknown”. So it is not a matter of showing the unknown as something that you should be scared of – decapitated people, rotting corpses, vampires or zombies, people with chainsaws – in *Natten* there is nothing like since these things are the “known unknown” or what we have in horror movies, whereas I was interested in an unknown to which there is no language. I want the audience to have a sense of fear; but not of something but of the lack of something. It is not the fear of nothing, it is the fear of nothing’s nothing because nothing is already something. There is nothing in this cup but this is also something. What we want to awaken in *Natten* is nothing’s nothing.

### **Like a metaphysical experiment..**

*Exactamento*. *La Substance* is also metaphysical in a Greek sense but *Natten* is metaphysical more in a contemporary, speculative form of metaphysics. Or even worse like in Greek. *La Substance*, but in English is of course utterly stupid. The substance doesn’t really need a translation; it is shit, right? We know it. « La substance » of course cannot be called that so I added « but in English ». Neither could *Natten* be called « The night ». *Natten* means in Swedish « the night » but the thing is that in Swedish you have the article in the last letter “n”. So, « nuit » is « nat » and « la nuit » would be « nuila ». Ant *Natten* can’t be called « la nuit » or people would think that it is a piano piece. It couldn’t be « la notte » then it would be a film. *Natten* is not scary either but it has a very particular sense, it is a Novalis kind of night and it is romantic and fucking fearsome. It is so fucking fearsome that it doesn’t even has to happen during the night, it is *Natten* in itself. It is the night in you, the eternal night... My work is never ever about something, it is something. Journalism is always about something, theatre is always about something, but dance must never be about something. It is not nothing, but it is never about.

### **How do you try to represent the nothing on stage if you think that the nothing can’t be represented? Do you think the stage is the best place to represent the nothing?**

Certainly not. I think it is the worst place and that’s why I decided to choose it. And I don’t think one can feel this. Nothing’s nothing is not felleable. Nothing is felleable but nothing’s nothing for sure not. It cannot be felt nor can it be experienced but it expresses itself as a sensation or it can be affectively flourishing in your body. In other words it is an experience to which there is no naming. You can only know that you have the experience, but this experience is not something. It is the experience that is the everything else or its own emptiness. Again, totally redundant end endless. But I am exactly interest in that because what do you do with this affect to which there is no surface or attachment? The work that I do is not about any politics, it definitely participates in more or less elegant contemporary regimes or politics or economy. *La Substance* is from one perspective a celebration of capitalism, totally, but that’s not all of it. It is also the melting of all the signs, a sort of reappropriation and recontextualisation.



But nor is my performance a political critic but I think because I'm convinced that contemporary capitalism has managed to financialize language to the extent where language cannot be a tool or an opportunity for the possibility of insurrection or for a revolution or for another kind of thought or another kind of systematic. But an experience that only refers to itself as its own emptiness is one that has no proposition. There is only fear or bliss. I also think that in this moment it opens for the possibility of production of a contingent character. It gives the possibility for the production of a thought that is not associated to anything but can show up. And it is not a matter of displaying metaphysics for the audience. My intention is rather, through withdrawal (like in *Natten*), to open you for the possibility to have an encounter with a localized metaphysics or a localized absolute. In the spectrum of that moment, there is also the possibility for a production contingent. Something can show up but it's absolutely non-correlated. If so, that might be absolutely the conventional way but it might also be the first moment of an entirely different way of being human, or an entirely different way of making sure that this world comes to an end. But the chance to do it in language in our ubiquitous capitalism doesn't apply. Capitalism (not the state capitalism) cannot be overrun through any other means than giving up our knowledge, subjectivity and navigation.

**In this reflection about the capitalism a major issue is the use of new technologies (references to the usage of cell phones, skype, facebook on stage)..**

It's a way to coming back to "turn off your mobile phones". No, please don't. The dance experience is in the capitalism but what it generates is the possibility of an experience that is contingent in that capitalism. I don't think that capitalism becomes less evil or exciting if we turn off the mobile phone when we go to the theater. Turning off capitalism isn't going to bring it away, it's rather a kind of acceleration if you want : "No, let's keep everything on and see how disturbance and interference can generate"; a bringing together of chains of signifiers, that are strongly reliable or completely incomprehensible. There are different kinds of monsters: the monster of Harry Potter, the monsters in the Lord of the Ring, the monsters in poststructuralism, *etc.* There are always hybrids. Half an eagle and half a lion, that's Harry Potter monsters. All these monsters are surprising to begin with but then they are just conventional. It's just a half a salmon, half a princess or half a frog, half a prince. They can either be on top of each other or in time of each other. Boring. Ultra fucking boring. These monsters are surprising yet conventional. What we want is a monster that is ordinary yet overwhelming.

In *Natten* there is nothing weird happening but the experience should be such that I cannot name it. It withdraws from being named and in this way it also needs to withdraw from becoming separate. It's not this part and that part and that part. It doesn't need to be the first part and the second part. Well, the first part was scary then of course the second part just looked like a lion so that we know how to get rid of it. And at the same time it's neither a one thing performance because you would also need a dramaturgy, a tension. It's very rare that somebody can retell the show. This sort of ordinary yet overwhelming, that's what this experience is, for which I don't have any name. I like when the audience comes out of the performance and one friend says to another "That was kind of really quite ..." and the friends

says “Perhaps...”. We were there and we need to talk about the performance but we don’t know what it is because we have no words for it. Instead of going for dinner after the show in order to be brilliant, elegant, exquisite, sophisticated with our interpretations of saying the performance is the translation of the second chapter of Plato. No. That is what we hate! What we really want is the audience to go to dinner together because we have become so stupid that we don’t know how to go home. We have to talk. We have to go for a dinner because we have to talk about this, because I don’t know what it is. I can’t go home. We have to get drunk. The only time you can go home without knowing what it is, is when you go home with somebody and you’re so drunk that you don’t remember. This is what we need.

### **Is it something that has completely disappeared from performances today?**

The only dance I have trust in or feelings for is French dance. Mark Tomkins for example. Jean Claude Vernant is also someone that I find quite fabulous as a performance maker. Cecilia Bengolea and François Chaignaud they have a tendency but they are so good business men that it usually disappears a little bit. For me, there are two kinds of artist and I don’t want to be one of them. The one, every work is an undoing of the legacy of the previous one. Xavier Leroy would be an example for it, the expression of the work changes but the underlying methodology. The other kind of artist is the one that invents a sort of recipe but then he changes the color of the cake. It is quiet easy to end up there. This year is about Egypt because they have their thousandth anniversary and so you can tour and show the work, which is good. The system of choreographic centers made that tendency a little bit too available. I have been very busy in choreography for 20 years expanding the understanding of choreography, detaching the choreography from dance to be a technology rather than a tool box to make dance, a technology that can approach the world. We have to have a choreographer when we make coffee see how it should be set up, different choreographies with different social setups. We can use the producing capacity of choreography and it’s analytical one. If I write a book or make a film, I need to make a decision which is, “do I do this as a film maker or do I do this as a choreographer that uses the medium?”. It’s two completely different things.

Choreography organizes. Choreography sets up structure. I have made the effort of saying choreography is something autonomous to dance, which doesn’t mean that they cannot be correlated with great fun, but dance isn’t supported by choreography. You can also use dance for other structures. Right now, I’m interested in the dance part. Then years before I would come to ImPulsTanz to present choreographies now what I’m doing is “dance performances”. They are not performances, they are “dance performances”. Dance as something that we draw from structuring. Choreography is in a way something that domesticates dance. But can we think of a non-domesticated dance which again refers to a wild dance to which there is no applicable structure, meaning that it is the experience of dance as dance; but dance as dance is also an empty experience otherwise it has a structure. The experience of dance is the experience of oneself experiencing experience. And this moment can have no structuring, that’s what *Natten* is about. It is the production of the possibility of an experience which refers only to itself through the means not of choreography, although *Natten* is choreographed,

but it is a choreography that may allow the withdrawing from structure. So it is rather choreography as a giving up of the grant or generosity or whatever.



### **What was the feedback for *La Substance* and *Natten*?**

*La Substance* is made for an audience that grew up with Internet. It's made for an audience that has not known scarcity. It's made for an audience that doesn't remember Cold War. It's made for an audience that has grown up in composed families; that has grown up in a situation where you don't educate yourself in order to get a job but you educate yourself because there is no work around. So you stay in education. It is done by people who have understood mobility very differently than a generation like mine that is from the sixties, or earlier. So young people, people born after 1980 are very happy about the piece and are very benevolent, saying that as an experience it is overwhelming but also that the dramaturgy is very differently thought in the sense that it is not mono climatic, it's superimposition rather than one after the other, abundance, rather than a sort of conceptual dance, sort of a subtractive attitude. You don't miss the discursive part or what it means.

The piece was also a reaction to my observation that all dance pieces are so fucking grey. Why aren't there any costumes? Why aren't there fabulous outfits? Why is there no hair, no makeup? Why is the set design always so sadly boring? So it's all a matter of making dance visible. Usually the way of making dance visible is white, male, heterosexual, Christian, academic, institutionalized, efficient, etc. and I wanted to make a piece that dealt with totally different opportunities and at the same time the fact to slow down the quality of the performers, it's also a way of withdrawing from personality and a sort of dancers dancing and dance is not more important than the bear glasses hanging over or one or another song or one

or another mystical, chemical transformation happening, because – it's not that I am against identity – but I'm interested in making works that don't deal with identity or whatsoever. In *La Substance*, the whole piece is about melting. *La Substance* is all a matter of making a situation where here is an object, here is another object but I don't know where they start and stop, where the outskirts of an object are. With all this melting and how the whole dance is constructed towards these improvisational part close to the end where people are dancing around with seven different songs. In a certain idée there is a climax there but I think that this climax comes way too late and there are many different ones. The breaking of the bear bottle is also a kind of climax and the big dance is another kind of climax. I was interested in making a dramaturgy that doesn't follow up a sort of heteronormative understanding.

Anyway, people were super happy about the piece except a few people who seem to think that if you don't make a disclaimer or if a dance is not an open critic of capitalism then it's a bad dance performance, it's an evil dance performance. This is a bit frustrating or surprising that certain people have such a constipated approach. If someone criticizes the pieces saying "it's banal", it's like a kindergarten, like a children party, doesn't he or she see a certain other level? Obviously the piece is dealing with a certain kind of innocence, a certain kind of childishness, a certain kind of idiocy but all of this is also smokescreens, right? See behind A LITTLE BIT. Because what they do is basically to say: "it's a serious politic critic" or "it's Anne Theresa" [de Keersmaecker].

Concerning *Natten*, the critics were more homogenous. There is this brilliant critic in a newspaper: the journalist said the piece is great but when you have to sit on blankets for seven hours it becomes unbearable. How can you be so fucking bourgeois that you don't stand up? Go for a walk then, idiot! The piece is seven hours. If you go for diner during one hour, you don't miss anything, I mean you miss something but that's okay. When you come back everything is the same and at the same time completely different. If I wanted you to have a comfortable position, I would of course have put fucking double beds there. Now you should understand that it was not a mistake if there were no mattresses. I think that one of the most important things in my work is that I am producing new kinds of audiences rather than using audience as we know it in order to look clever.

Also there, with a younger audience, it seems that *Natten* created quiet intense impressions. You have people saying that it was a wonderful experience, with a smile on their face and other people saying that it was great but that they definitively don't want to go back there because what they experienced was so dark; basically it opens up people. A lot of people cried but at the same time a lot of people slept, which I think is great. Two guys were sleeping next to me, sleeping as a couple which was great. When do you do this and feel comfy while being next to another 65 people? *Natten* is a sustainable show. We did it in Belgium in a church, in Italy in a gym and in Norway in a classical theatre hall. *Natten* seems to be a game changer. Somebody said to me that he got interested into dance because of a conceptual work at the end of the 90's and that since then nothing interesting has happens until *Natten*. And this was an academically and scholarly trained person. He said that this was the first time he had seen something where he cannot immediately sit down and write something about it right away.

**Regarding *Dawn*, could you tell me more about the choice of the music (cyclical sample of Drake during 75mn), the choreography and what you wanted to express with this piece?**

Basically it's a great song, especially without singing. It's a piece that is supposed to be minimally interesting. It should be interesting but minimally interesting. *Hotline Bling* is exactly that. It's minimally interesting, especially if you play it sixty times in a row but it is still something that you sit there after fourteen times. Or, just go home and I'm fine. Why does every fucking dance performance either have a Tchaikovsky's symphony or an exciting music? *Hotline bling* is there to be minimally interesting and to make you think: "Here nothing exciting is gonna happen". So now, instead of expecting something exciting either ok, fine, I'm leaving, or things maybe start to show up in this landscape that make it worth to stay. *Hotline Bling* on repeat, the film by James Banning, is of course also minimally interesting and then the dancing is made out of six materials that are again minimally interesting but there is also a lot of construction that makes something appear, something go away, a new constellation comes to force, things that happening in the shadows of each other. The story that I hopefully never told you before but when I was little I went with my mother and my grandmother to the beach often in the fall and we went to the beach just to see the sun going down – we never saw the sun because everything is grey anyway – and the way it was disappearing in the dark. When it was dark, we still know that the waves are there and the sound is there and we could stay for a really long time and this is how *Dawn* should be: Minimally interesting, being there with a bunch of people, or in couple but we don't really need to talk we know each other too well and the sun is going down and the waves are still there, the dancers are still there. It is a place where I am allowed to have thoughts rather than being told what you think. 99 out of 100 dance performances are so keen on telling the audience something whereas I think that what makes dance so exciting, so extraordinary, is that it can just be there, like a tree. Super. The best ever. But we have to be very careful about how to make those proposals, how to organize the making visible of indifference. In the piece, what becomes visible is an indifference. It doesn't matter in this piece if it's after five minutes or after fifty five minutes. It's just there like a tree. It's seventy five minutes of suspense because nothing is really going on. It's very scary in a way. At a certain moment what do you hold on as a spectator?

Next I want to make a theater piece. I think that it's too easy with dance now; the next thing is to conquer language. I grew up with television and television had a 'tableau' so you could skip through the different channels, one channel up, one channel down. This sort of dramaturgy is very different now. Now we watch television and you are on Internet and internet has a dramaturgy without tableau, it's individualized, which can be bad, but somehow you're making decisions, you're making choices on different levels. With *The Internet*, *La Substance* and *Dawn* the feeling that it should provoke and how it's done is like an internet dramaturgy: they have associations but they are not necessarily in style.

**A zapping generation..**



Exactly, and I wanted it to be like this, I want those people to see it not people that grew up with television. I want my work to be seen by the future and not by the ones that have already decided to die. Why should dance not be contemporary? Contemporary dance is not so contemporary. Why doesn't it treat Internet while other art forms have done it? When artist have already consumed it and thrown it away? Dance in this festival seems to be something that was created in the fifties. Horrid. And the internet proposes different kinds of attentions so "How are we attentive when we watch youtube or when we hang out on the web?", "What are the understandings?", "How do we comprehend stuff?", *etc.*

To tell you the truth, my aspiration is to do not just high culture but super high culture. The aspiration is not to do popular culture or alternative art, no. The work that I do should end up in the Paris Opéra. I mean or at least, it's the Paris Opéra that I want to change with this work. I don't want to be on some Indie label or whatever. The others, at the Opéra, they put more of the same of the old. It's still very strongly bourgeois. They change the semiotic but they don't change the grammar. I think Bob Wilson changed the grammar of the opéra. I think Stockhausen changed the grammar of music. I think Le Corbusier changed the grammar of architecture together with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe probably. Cunningham changed the grammar of dance. The common understanding of Cunningham tries to make him not have changed the grammar. So we read Cunningham absolutely wrong. It was not a reaction to Marta Graham that made him do what he did, it was an altogether story. It was necessity that made him do what he did and being the individual he was he had to do it with John Cage. And then it was a matter of thinking how can I not betray my sexuality and the person that I am without being excluded by the uptown dance context. If he had done anything that smelled gay he would have been kicked from New Jersey and he would never have been seen again. So I think that what both of them did was a kind of negative politics. So instead of showing camp gay queer stuff what they did was to go formalist : away from narration, away from composition, away from statement, away from hierarchical collaborations, so these kind of Cunningham pieces they don't state themselves as gay but they withdraw from the possibility of heterosexual capturing.



SØVNLOSSET

## Kanskje er det på tide å innse at årvåkenhet er oppskrytt, skriver Ina Blom.

En relativt nøytral stemning gled over i noe mørkere og mer anspent: den tåkete følelsen av angst og paranoia som gjerne slår til hos søvnløse i 3-4-tiden om morgenen

**M**å man være våken når man ser et kunstverk? Hvor våken må man være? Er det i det hele tatt mulig å oppleve kunst i en halvbevisst tilstand?

Årvåkenhet er det offisielle idealet, frykten for å gå glipp av noe er konstant. Skal man yte et verk rettferdighet må man være fullt og helt til stede, ingen detalj må unnsilpe. Dette kom klart til uttrykk da Morgenbladets anmelder skrev om Mårten Spångbergs åtte timer lange danseforestilling *Natten*, som ble vist på Black Box Teater i Oslo 3. og 4. juni. Det var søvndyssende, klaget hun.

andre ord arrangert med tanke på svekket oppmerksomhet, muligheten for å ikke være helt til stede.

Slik ble vi bokstavelig talt danset i søvn. Ikke en såkalt «god søvn», men den typen halvvåken rastløs tilstand som mange av oss søvnløse kjenner godt til, der man ikke lenger vet hva som er klar bevissthet og hva som er drømmevisjoner. Jevnlige forstyrrelser – plutselige brudd i lydbildet, et enkelt kraftig signal – hindret de bedre sovehjertene i forsamlingen i å koble fullstendig ut. Og idet denne tilstanden var fullt etablert – det tok et par timer – ble det klart at vi ikke var lenger var publikum foran et show, men disponibler kroppene i en totalsituasjon som også inkluderte musikk, lys, koreografi og dansere.

Det var på dette tidspunktet at forestillingen skiftet gir. En relativt nøytral stemning gled over i noe mørkere og mer anspent: den tåkete følelsen av angst og paranoia som gjerne slår til hos søvnløse i 3-4-tiden om morgenen. Man er for våken til å ignorere det, men for søvnnig til å gjøre noe med det. Man vet at nå er det bare å holde ut, til morgenen kommer. Og det var akkurat det forestillingen gjorde: Den holdt ut. Med en tett vev av detaljer jobbet den seg gjennom halvsøvnens ulike sinnstilstander, inklusiv en slapp tomhet. Den guidet det hele inn i roligere og mer forsonlige farvann, mot noe som kunne ligne på faktisk søvn, fulgt av langsom, ambivalent oppvåkning. Vi snublet ut i strålende morgensol halv åtte og greide knapt å applaudere. En god dårlig natt.

Dårlig komponert, med andre ord. Men hva om dette var en forestilling der alt faktisk var lagt til rette for et halvsovende publikum? Og hva om forestillingen også kunne sees som et bidrag til de stadig mer kritiske debattene om søvnens politikk i en verden som er våken og «på nett» 24 timer i døgnet, og der kravet om full oppmerksomhet har både moralske og økonomiske dimensjoner?

Da vi ble sluppet inn i Black Box' store sal klokken halv tolv på kvelden – vanlig leggetid – ble vi tilbudt madrasser og tepper, ikke stoler. Noen sovende figurer – kulliser, men plassert i publikumsområdet – ga et hint om hvor-

dan vi kunne forholde oss til situasjonen. Rommet lå i et grønt halvmørke og scenoområdet var bare opplyst av noen spredte, svake lyskilder, som nattlamper. Ingen lyskastere fulgte dansernes bevegelser – de var mer eller mindre synlige avhengig av hvor de beveget seg i rommet. Store deler av tiden utførte de skyggeaktige bevegelser i presist koreograferte gruppeformasjoner, avløst av friere individuelle turer rundt i rommet.

Ikke noe var spesielt dramatisk eller slående, dansen utgjorde heller et slags diskret mønster. Og musikken var basert på loops, altså på søvndyssende gjentagelser. Alt var med

Med jevne mellomrom gir avisene råd om hvordan du skal forbedre søvnkvaliteten din eller advarer om helsefarene ved for lite søvn. Søvneksperter anbefaler pc-fritt soverom, legemiddelindustrien lover kjemiske snarveier. Men en voksende kulturhistorisk og politisk litteratur ser det hele fra et mer overgripende perspektiv.

Hos forfattere som Jonathan Crary (24/7), Simon Williams (*The Politics of Sleep*) og Matthew Wolf-Meyer (*The Slumbering Masses*) er alt søvnmaset bare et symptom på mer enn hundre år med intensivt fokus på oppmerksomhetens problem – et tema som preger alt fra skolesystemet (hvordan få alle til å følge med, hele dagen), til media (hvordan fange og holde på oppmerksomheten til så mange som mulig, gjøre den regulærbar og forutsigbar), til moderne arbeidsliv (du er i prinsippet våken og tilgjengelig når som helst på døgnet). Søvn er dermed ikke lenger en enkel fysiologisk funksjon, men et teknisk hinder: nok et aspekt ved det biologiske livet som er regulert, og som må kontrolleres og doseres ut på riktige måter.

Kulturlivet gir få alternativer. Idealet er å greie å «følge med» på en enorm og global produksjon i alle sjangre, og kunstkritikere har permanent dårlig samvittighet fordi de ikke har mentalt overskudd til nok en utstilling med lange videoarbeider. Men kanskje er det på tide å innse det åpenbare: at årvåkenhet er oppskrytt.

Kanskje er det, som Crary hevder, et frifhetspotensial i den uklare tilstanden mellom våkenhet og drøm, med hele det arsenal av assosiasjoner og følelser som oppstår når hjernen arbeider fritt og uten målsetning. I så måte var *Natten* det viktigste kunstver-

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## The 2015 Oslo International Festival at Black Box Theatre

Andrew Friedman – spring 2016

Excerpt



The Oslo International Festival, now in its seventh year, has established itself as a vital destination on the experimental performance circuit. The festival and Black Box Theatre, which runs the event, serve a critical function in Norway's performing arts community. While Oslo is home to other prominent theatres, notably the massive National Theatre and the small company-run *Grusomhetens Teater* (Theatre of Cruelty), Black Box is the city's premiere touring and producing venue for international and domestic experimental work. Comparable to Berlin's HAU (Hebbel am Ufer) theatre or New York City's Under the Radar Festival, Black Box introduces Oslo audiences to preeminent global artists like Annie Dorsen, Forced Entertainment, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Showcase Beat Le Mot, and MOTUS, while producing Norwegian groups including Verk Produksjoner, Findlay/Sandsmark/Pettersen, and Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller. Started in 1985 in a former chocolate factory, the theatre and festival has been led by Artistic Director Jon Refsdal Moe since 2009. Commandeering the building's two dedicated theatre spaces, the lobby, and an adjacent dance studio, the nine-day festival featured fifteen productions. This year's events are emblematic of Black Box's role within the country, bringing together established and emerging artists from home and abroad with particular emphasis on works from Europe and Scandinavia.

The 2015 festival was organized around the question of faith in performance's potential/s. For the festival program, each artist or group was asked, "Do you believe in theatre?" Their replies—ranging from dismissal, critical reflection, to warm embrace—were collected in the brochure. The diversity of responses reflects the heterogeneity of contemporary performance in which conceptual, theoretical, and disciplinary lines are regularly blurred under the collective mantle of "performance." One predominant theme, among the works I attended, was the act of spectatorship. There was little uniformity to approaching audiences, but questioning what artists and audiences do, make, and mean in the act of watching was of continual concern. Mårten Spångberg's *The Internet* continues his interest in making performances that do not attempt to hold the audience's attention. Philippe Quesne's *La Mélancolie des Dragons* celebrates the generosity underlining the mutual construction of fantasy and belief. Dana Michel's *Yellow Towel*, meanwhile, short-circuits spectatorial expectations of how race is performed and thereby consumed. Rabih Mouré's *Riding on a Cloud* erodes the possibility of truth and authenticity in narrative and theatrical representation. Erika Cederqvist and Julie Solberg's *His Own Room* lovingly toys with spectators' assumptions about gender and sexuality. Despite their eclecticism, these works all concern themselves with (re-)thinking how theatrical engagement makes meaning.

*The Internet* (2015), co-commissioned by Black Box, is a continuation of the Swedish choreographer Mårten Spångberg's exploration of choreography as an "expanded field." As with Spångberg's two previous works, *La Substance, but in English* (2014) and *The Nature* (2013), *The Internet* extends its organization beyond bodily movements (dance) to construct calculated interactions between gestures, sounds, landscape, objects, and spectators. For the show's three-and-a-half hours, the choreographic exchanges unfold at a leisurely pace. Long stretches of time are spent watching the dancers check their phones, change clothes, make small talk amongst themselves, or carry out seemingly inconsequential tasks. Spectators meanwhile sit on the floor engaged (or disengaged) as sonic and gestural motifs emerge, slightly adjusting the atmosphere, pulling focus or setting it adrift. These little arcs suggest narrative—or rather invite us to project it—but the developments are all architecture, albeit one that resonates affectively. At times the performance feels like a loop, at others linear, and again like it is not moving at all. All that misshapen time opens up space to do what one wants with the show: make up a story, marvel at the performers' studious informality, let one's mind wander, or update one's Facebook page. The experience is something like a theatrical bird watching in which enjoying one's time in the environment is equal to seeing anything exotic.

Structured around a series of musical and physical repetitions, *The Internet* creates an atmosphere in which to measure incremental changes. The performance begins with a thirty-

minute loop of the melancholy piano refrain of Rihanna's pop-ballad "Stay" (2013). The song's plodding repetition is the show's *leitmotif*, returning in the final hour as an emotional mnemonic that frames the performance as cyclical. The three dancers, Sandra Lolax, Rebecca Stillman, and Marika Troili—all regular collaborators of Spångberg—stroll and stand around at the outset. They form circles and talk in whispers or crouch together on the floor. Their demeanor is unhurried but they are aware of their audience—half-smiles, glances, and shrugs punctuate their unheard conversations. It is hard not to see their behavior as permission or, better yet, instructions on how to nonchalantly watch the show.

The dancers intermittently engage in choreography that reveals a debt to modern dance, ballet, and the pedestrian movements first developed by Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton at Judson Church in the 1960s. Each performer operates on a separate track, occasionally synchronizing only to disassemble into their own patterns: one may adopt a variation of another's movements or shuffle off to read some notes or watch the other dancers. The fluidity of the performance masks its refinement, which is most noticeable in the performers' discipline hidden beneath layers of sangfroid. The breezy style aspires to create a performance space detached from expectation and consequence, cause and effect. The aim often requires the dancers to work against the other performance elements. As the music switches to Jennifer Lopez's 1999 party-anthem "Let's Get Loud," Lolax, Stillman, and Troili meander around the space or sit unaffected among the piles of props that constitute the stage. At other times the dancers are filled with a playfulness wholly detached from the performance itself. The performers disrupt any sense of causality by oscillating between laxity and commitment that responds or, at times, is impervious to the theatrical environment. Coupled with the musical and physical loops and slow pacing, the production works to circumvent expectations of progress. Allowing one's attention to drift or investing it, frequently produces a heightened awareness, a training of one's senses on minor developments. The audience is periodically alive with diffuse chatter before collectively refocusing itself on the performers. Occasionally, these shifts seem to stem from the dancers and at other times, they mysteriously originate from affective ripples in the larger room.

The strange, idiosyncratic scenic design features clusters of found and handmade objects—a mainstay of Spångberg's work since 2011—that change from production to production. His previous work, *La Substance*, was a pasteboard of sparkles and logos, gooey slime and syrups: the up-chuck of a teen shopping-spree sound-tracked by songs celebrating inhibition. *The Internet* has a more reserved tone. Here, a pastel rainbow tapestry hangs above a laminate floor of grainy color patterns evoking the warm-color palette of a kindergarten classroom. Objects are strewn across the floor—piles of clothes, soda cans, and Styrofoam sculptures, including an impressively gaudy pink charm bracelet whose bulk suggests the life-



sized anchor to Barbie's pink Yacht. These objects are drawn into the action (or ignored) as the dancers use buck-knives to whittle sticks atop a blanket or stand at attention with wooden rifles. Changing outfits, which occurs constantly throughout the show, constitutes one of the performers' main choreographic activities. The dancers' blasé swapping of clothes refreshes the landscape with new fabrics, textures, and colors. The allusions the attire produces are more utilitarian than those of Spångberg's previous works. Whereas the wardrobe for *La Substance* evoked a psychedelic lingerie show, *The Internet* features dancers in overalls, McDonald's uniforms, business suits, airline stewardess dress, and includes a runway crew member in an electric-orange jumpsuit. The costuming evokes dichotomies of labor and leisure, diligence and idleness, but given the show's overall opacity, even these generalizations seem like overstatements.

What one ultimately makes of *The Internet* may come down to what one thinks of its creator. A mercurial polemicist, Spångberg is a machine-gun of theoretical flotsam wrapped in the surfer-cool of a class-clown. He is, after all, always lurking in and around the performance to show us how to watch his productions. He moves through the audience, checking his phone, dragging a microphone to sing along to the show's playlist, snapping photos of the action, and conspicuously bolting to the lobby every thirty minutes or so. His performance is the theatrical equivalent of cracking a beer. It can feel forced at times, as when Spångberg cuddles up to the unsuspecting somebody for a selfie—a form of inclusion that feels at odds with the show's otherwise studious detachment. But his target is clear and his aim is steady: why persist with viewing behaviors drummed up in the nineteenth century when the world outside the theatre has changed so radically? Those who prefer the former path usually leave within the first hour. Those who stay, warm up to it, learning to take what they need and leave the rest. People watch and sleep, talk, take pictures, and spill beer bottles hidden in the tangle of lounging spectators. However you want to watch the performance is alright with Spångberg and soon enough, this permissive vibe permeates the room.

In his program notes, Spångberg cites the influence of monumental sculpture on *The Internet*. Both, for Spångberg, “exceed context, [and are] indifferent or simply material” (Mårten Spångberg, <http://www.blackbox.no/tittel/the-internet>). Visual artist Jason Dodge is a noted influence, whose works consist of displaying objects alongside matter-of-fact descriptions. In Dodge's most recent exhibition at New York's Casey Kaplan Gallery, for example, a yellow pillow is accompanied by only its title: *The Mayor is sleeping; A pillow that has only been slept on by the mayor of Nuremberg* (2014). Dodge and Spångberg share a common concern of not instrumentalizing the images they create. The role of interpretation is for the audience alone. But these are no Rorschach tests. The puzzling ambiguity of Spångberg's works never arises from abstraction, rather from the enjambment of obliquely

recognizable images, sounds, and movements. To pull one element free and elevate it to the production's meaning is a dubious task. This is the kind of indivisibility that Spångberg's program notes ascribe to the Internet as well as the universe, the ocean, and nature. The draw of these irreducible objects is their refusal to be rightly interpreted. Without interpretation comes spectatorial egalitarianism, or, for Spångberg, "in front of that kind of stuff, we are equal, unconditionally equal. (Ibid.)

Whether performance can ever be as indivisible as the Internet or nature, and produce an equality of spectating is questionable. But compared to calls to return to a theatre of dutiful, silent attention—spearheaded by the likes of Patti Lupone and Benedict Cumberbatch—Spångberg's work is filled with the fresh air of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, the extent to which Spångberg and his collaborators need to embody the equality and informality they hope to engender highlights just how resistant audiences are to such changes—save for the group of friends who devoured potato chips and champagne throughout the performance.

Kicking Back: Nature of Choreography Revised, With Beer Cans

## **‘La Substance, but in English’ Tweaks Consumerism**

By GIA KOURLAS

JAN. 13, 2014



Debate swirling around the wave of dance presentation in museums hasn't dissipated over the last couple of years. For one thing, economic inequality between the dance and art worlds isn't likely to go away. Over the weekend at MoMA PS1, the Swedish choreographer Marten Spangberg added another layer to the conversation with “La Substance, but in English,” a four-and-a-half-hour work performed Sunday afternoon as part of the American Realness festival.

It was long — the final hour didn't exactly fly by — but “La Substance” made for a hallucinatory experience equally illuminating and tedious.

Mr. Spangberg wittily transformed the MoMA PS1 Performance Dome into something of a marijuana den: Branches with giant leaves dangled over the stage. The floor was littered with pizza boxes, bottles of soda and costumes that the dancers wore and discarded with frequency. Music, a stream of hip-hop and pop songs, insulated the space with a steady, sensuous pulse. Cans of beer were passed around. Yet little was as casual as it seemed.

Mr. Spangberg has recently begun experimenting with ways to focus on an expanded notion of choreography — how the word implies more about constructing time and space than knitting together steps. (Which is

not to say that his talented cast of eight, wearing fantastical and disturbing stage makeup, didn't slip in a quick pas de chat or two.)

During "La Substance," which also featured Yoann Durant singing along to recorded tracks, audience members, seated on the floor or standing, were free to come and go. Yet most stayed put in this slow-cooker environment, which was a little like watching a sunset. It changed just enough to hold your gaze.

Some in the audience opted to spend time not watching, but painting colors on a mural sketched onto the same wall that Mr. Spangberg leaned against as he watched, tapped on his computer and signaled to his cast. The back curtain, a silver-and-gold patchwork design with large squares of material touting Chanel, Gucci and Louis Vuitton, contrasted with performers who walked and rose from or sank to the floor in slow motion, often pausing to look out at us as we watched them: a reflection of landscapes.

But there were jubilant, saucy dances, too, raw alternatives to more mechanical commercial interpretations to pop songs. The excellent Emma Kim Hagdahl, with tears made of glitter streaming down her cheeks, could gyrate her hips with playful insouciance or freeze time with an icy stare. At one point, the cast members, eyes closed, simply sat near the front of the stage. Behind them, the logo curtain fluttered. The amplified sound of an email being sent was a jarring interruption.

Within this oddly gentle, one-moment-rolling-into-the-next atmosphere was a stinging critique about consumerism in and out of the art world and, of course, the erosion of attention spans. In "La Substance," Mr. Spangberg makes sharp points as he examines the nature of time: Instead of bodies he choreographed air and, to his credit, that took a few hours really to sink in.

## An afternoon with The Internet – Mårten Spångberg Supportico Lopez



Text: Sarah Rosengarten - 06.03.2015, KubaParis

It is Saturday 3 p.m. and rainy. I am entering the gallery Supportico Lopez. There will be a performance taking place shortly. This already happened the day before and my friend M attended. She recommended it to me, which is actually the only reason I am showing up – I have not been especially excited about performing art so far.

I guess I am early, one of the first few in this place. The man who I spot as the artist and choreographer, Mårten Spångberg, throws an encouraging smile and a Welcome at me.

Immediately I feel noticed in a nice way, somehow included.

The large room is rectangular. I enter, move a little bit away from the door and turn to the bigger side of the room, rabbit holes for the gallerists and the bathroom behind me. I am facing an area that seems to be installed as the performance environment. Spångberg uses a wild and colourful decoration: Patterned textiles (leopard, zebra and cannabis plant print, chess squares, a big panda chewing on bamboo, poke dots, flags and stripes) and golden and silver foils are duck taped on the wall to the right. The area that serves as the ground for actions to come is marked with a see-through foil stretched over a carpet of pink, violet and white squares. It reminds me of kindergarden plastic underlays as precaution in case toddlers suddenly start pooping or puking. Three wooden rifles are leaning against the wall textiles and closed Pizza boxes on a mobile are dangling from the ceiling. Spread out on the floor: chaotic heaps of clothing, bottles of lemonade and beer (Corona and Desperados), chocolate bars, crisp bags and paper bags from Whole Foods. A huge wooden chain attached to an oversized wooden anchor frames the play area, adding a humorous maritime air. Two blankets, with the word Unrendered printed in large letters on one and the term PDF on the other, are arranged on the plastic foil, as the only direct web reference I



can discover so far.

Not far from my current spot I discover nine wooden sticks plugged into Lion chocolate bar wraps, arranged in a loose circle. I am thinking it looks perfecting itself as a small artwork inside this larger installation. The sticks do remind of chocolate and of the scene in the movie *American Pie* when Stiffler is forced to eat chocolate candy that is actually human excrement. Generally, I feel as if the gallery room is prepped for ANY kind of spectacle. The objects suggest endless potential for big action: A salad bowl of symbols and possible references hopefully revealing a meaning soon.

While Mårten Spångberg is sitting on the side, three young women stand on the pink/violet ground and are facing each other, conversating in Swedish and giggling quite often. I do not understand them; it could be complete gibberish. Once in a while they come together and physically touch each other on their arms or legs, as if they want to create bridges so that their human energy can flow between them and through each other. They freeze in those positions. The human sculptures they create that way remind me of old oil paintings from the German North Frisian Islands, showing kids frozen in their performing of traditional round dances. The high quality sound system next to the back wall is blasting poppy music. In the first second of the first song I think this must be BEYONCÉ. It seems to be a loop of the beginning of one of her tracks.

The performing young women are wearing working clothes; these typical bright orange uniforms used by the garbage men or construction workers on highways. They seem a little oversized for the frail dancers. It makes one think of kids dressing up as grown ups and being very serious about it.

I wonder what the performers are discussing. Are they mapping out the next steps in the choreography? Or could they be small talking or even gossiping about the audience? Would my focus change substantially if I understood Swedish and would I be very occupied trying to understand? I am thankful for my lack of comprehension of the Swedish language in this case. The three performers appear to be incredibly charming. Every one of them has their special physical and behavioural traits that make her seem honest and sympathetic. So I can easily forgive them that I am excluded from their conversations. I would probably forgive them anything. I wonder how much the artist had taken the audience's empathy into account. I am beginning to think that he is quite a clever guy.

Maccarena is being played and I am so surprised about the non-reactions. Not only the three women are unbothered, stand rather motionless in the middle of their little playground, but also the viewers don't even nod move their heads. Strange. It seems like an unofficial rule, that nobody has passed on to me, to not anticipate the rhythm physically. I can barely hold back. Now they have put on these white sneaker-like shoes, stylistically rated between nurse and crocs. The tallest of the three who looks like she is the cousin of Eowyn from *Lord of the Rings* now squats in the back in a white hoodie while the two others are engaged in a sitting choreography on the floor, still wearing the orange work clothing. Their movements are harmonic and organic, like a dance of gratitude towards mother earth.

I associate mermaids, eels, growing lotus flowers, and fertility goddesses.

The young women are still nonchalantly ignoring the audience, no sings of arrogance though. It is more as if they have no real interest in anybody outside their small group.

The pop music supports their attitude towards the entire event. There is no pathos, exaggerated seriousness or superfluous placing of emphasis on anything, as it often bugs me in performance art.

I notice that none of the three women is either particularly feminine or sexy. That is supported through some of the lightly oversized and mostly gender-neutral clothing.

I slowly get convinced that everything is accurately planned while it looks effortless.

The movements flow and grow into each other very naturally. Again, in intervals the young women physically connect for a short moment, occasionally in rather acrobatic positions. I have to think of Sailor Moon, where the girls join to combine their astrological powers.

I suddenly remember the name of the performance: *The Internet*. I should probably have a look at the press release? Now or later? I am torn between discussing this matter internally and paying attention to what is happening in front of me. Being a good art receiver is a quite difficult task.

It seems to me that in his performance Spångberg brought the vibe of the Internet into an

analogue form. The incorporated objects are very haptic; the movements of the performers are strongly human and natural, even though I was silly enough to expect robot dances beforehand. The performance area is stuffed with a complex variety of symbols and motifs including labels and patterns, both characteristic for the web. Meanwhile the young females have come to sit down on the blanket with the word Unrendered printed on. They are now wearing stewardess uniforms, and each of them is carving with a knife on a piece of wood. It triggers a vision of girl scouts who build a wooden world (chain, anchor, rifles) inside this realm of colourful chaos. The sound of birds singing adds up to the image and for the first time the audio piece seems to support the visual aesthetics. This fantastic and very pretty scenario seems to me like a very literal image of the return to the analogue world.

I notice that the performers use little logbooks. Another celebration of the analogue way of doing things and/or simply a tool for them to remember their script?

The tallest performing woman then dances alone to a song repeating the word supernatural in the lyrics while the chains of movements loop as well. The moment I enjoy most in this choreography is when at one point she bends up forming imaginary revolvers with her fingers and playfully shooting around. The other two are attentively watching her like older siblings being proud of the youngest finally making progress in crawling. They acknowledge the rhythm by nodding and all three smile conspiratorially at each other. Occasionally the tallest one winks. I wonder if in this case finally the seductiveness of pop music succeeded or if the nodding is rehearsed. Shirts with big peace signs are put on. A symbol that is so incorporated in my daily vision that I forget what it actually stands for. Completely worn down by overuse, misuse and amusement it has become a cliché. I see it as an example for procedures in the web: Rapid reproduction/ multiplication and ironical transformation of symbols until they fully loose or change their original meaning.

Another outfit change into trainers is taking place which seems logical to me. Strangely this performance starts to make perfect sense to me without me being able to verbalize my understanding.

I wonder what is going on inside the heads of the young women. Is there any room to have thoughts that are unrelated to the performance? I wonder if this particular performance is one of those procedures that have the power to lift the one practicing it up into a very pure state of happiness? The performers seem to be lacking any burdening self-awareness or self-consciousness. I catch myself envying them and wishing to switch places.

Finally they nonchalantly open the coke bottles and chocolate bars. I enjoy that they are supplied with sugar as if I was being treated as well. They are probably in need of it by now.

Simultaneously, the music is playing while the young women are eating and talking without acknowledging the tunes at all.

In the next instance the wooden rifles are picked up. However, while I would have expected a childish hunting game to come along with these tools, they young women only pose with the fake weapons. Especially the tall elfish performer looks greatly decorated with the accessory, like an amazon or a warrior queen silently waiting for the right target.

What are the rifles representing, I wonder. Is the existence in the realm of the internet, in this case the gallery space as a metaphor for it, potentially equipping you with a weapon?

The song I am on top of the world is kicking in. It seems to lighten the performers moods even though they are as usual not anticipating the rhythm of the melody. I am feeling as well that it is lifting me up and carrying me to a happy cloud.

I am shifting my attention to the artist for a moment, observing his reactions to his piece. Seemingly he is concentrated and relaxed. On the first sight one would think he acts out some kind of an artist cliché by presenting himself in training trousers and a grey shirt, wearing his hair long and mildly messy, a designer stubble and unusually shaped glasses. I see him as extroverted and self-confident. But the longer I observe him and let the performance work on me the more I am neglecting my first impression. I have to think about the widely despised term authentic. In the end I cannot help to think that it is suiting for him.

And the performing young women I admire by now. They appear to be extraordinarily healthy, in a physical and mental way. Through them, exceptionally positive vibes are connected to the word Internet.

Now that I see that props are being used: When the hell are they going to drink the beer? It bothers me to see the alcoholic beverages ignored for so long.

The Whole Foods shopping bags indicate that some of the products must have been imported, while others, like the McDonald's cups could have been bought in Germany. Does that indicate



that the specific labels have a meaning? Why Vittel and not Evian? Why Desperados and not Jever? I am trying to figure out the role of Whole Foods in this arrangement, searching through my brain for an idea what this chain stands for. All I come up with is the notion of healthy food and the idea that it is very popular amongst American celebrities.

It seems as if the products themselves are a topic of the performer's acting. They explore the labels and seem to read the ingredients. Maybe they are saying: We gotta convince Marten to get Bounty next time, this just tastes rotten! Or I should really not eat this since I am on diet these days.

Then two of the performing women, now in grey suits, roll around on the kindergarden plastic foil, sometimes one gets on top of the other or suddenly finds herself in headlock. For the first time I sense an erotic tension or a hint to it at least. I wonder if this is intended. It seems hardly believable to choreograph something like this without having sexual associations in mind. It is certainly a powerful image: two young women in business suit wrestling tenderly in a colourful playground. The third one is holding an iPhone wearing a McDonald's work uniform (Is she supposed to be texting, tweeting, instagramming or playing angry birds? Does she have a specific task given by the artist for this moment or is it only about the image of her holding this item?). I find it difficult to place this image in the context of the title *The Internet* but have the feeling that something is being accurately conveyed here.

Slow motion movements are taking over while techno is being played (it triggers a feeling I had when I watched *Springbreakers*). Two performers are wearing the McDonald's work uniform and drink Coke. I assume it is an intended brand combination. Is Spångberg viewing those brands critically or does he position himself rather as an observer?

The performers are now moving quite slowly and canny, a way a McDonald's worker would definitely not behave.

Slowly I think of leaving. I have had three intense hours with *The Internet* by Mårten Spångberg. Strange enough, I am not waiting for the soon end of the performance.

However, I realise that my focus and concentration are not sufficient anymore.

I do not see this piece as something fitting to the assignment of suffering through.

There has been no suffering in this experience and to me there is no narration that has to be followed until the end in order to have the full experience. So I am slipping my iPhone and notebook into my backpack and let the beat carry me outside.

# Critical Acts

## Substance-resonance

Mårten Spångberg's *La Substance, but in English*

**André Lepecki**

Mårten Spångberg's multiple and concurrent activities as curator, visual artist, lecturer, essayist, editor, performer, rock-band musician, and choreographer have in recent years held a close dialogue with speculative philosophy (specifically with the Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani and the "object-oriented" philosophers, such as Graham Harman) and political philosophy (primarily Slavoj Žižek and

Jacques Rancière). This convergence between philosophical speculation and artistic-curatorial imagination takes a particularly powerful concretion in Spångberg's latest choreographic work, *La Substance, but in English*, presented in early January 2014 in New York at MoMA PS1's performance dome space.

*La Substance, but in English*, lasting 4 hours and 20 minutes, is set up with the



Figure 1. Shine, glitter, and two-liter bottles of Coke. Mårten Spångberg's *La Substance, but in English*. MoMA PS1, 12 January 2014. Performers: Linda Blomquist, Aron Blom, Ludvig Daae, Yoann Durant, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Sandra Lolax, Linnéa Martinsson, Pontus Pettersson, Rebecka Stillman, Hanna Strandberg, Marika Troili. (Photo by Charles Roussel)

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apparent casual informality of a Happening, but unfolding as a deeply formalist, minutely choreographed project. Performed by eight dancers (Aron Blom, Hanna Strandberg, Ludvig Daae, Sandra Lolax, Linnea Martinsson, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Rebecka Stillman, Pontus Pettersson), one musician/singer (Yoann Durant), Marten Spångberg himself, and (with different degrees of engagement and enthusiasm) occasionally the audience, the work is also performed, and quite importantly so, by dozens of glittering and sparkling quotidian objects carefully distributed across the scene: shiny gift bags, silk cloth banners sporting high-fashion logos such as Chanel or Yves Saint Laurent, tall glass vessels with improbable greenish contents, heated metal plates with containers filled with boiling wax, a pile of butter sticks softening under the white theatrical lights, four humidifiers vaporizing the energy drink Monster at full blast, chemical agents such as polyurethane, Hydrogen peroxide, dry yeast, dish-washing soap, two-liter bottles of Coke, bottles of Listerine (carefully lined up in gradations of blue to green) and of chocolate syrup, a pyramid of neatly arranged oranges, several deodorant sticks (including Axe roll-on, which dancer Rebecka Stillman applied to herself throughout), and many more objects (additional props built by Marika Troili). The accumulation of stuff does not create a sense of chaos or hoarding. Instead, clear lines arrange the disposition of things throughout the linoleum-covered performance area, just as there is a careful choreographic geometry in the many group dances that will appear and disappear throughout the piece.

In *La Substance*, dance is indeed a modulating force that momentarily invades the dancers' bodies, only to drop them cold, back to their absurd, or hollow, small tasks, or quite often, back to just being there doing nothing much other than squatting, idling, laying down. At these moments, the dancers' (in)actions mirror closely those of the audience, who are on the periphery, squatting, laying down, idling under

the dome along with the glitter of all those substances onstage: human and nonhuman, visual and sonic.

The shimmering geometry, the apparently happy consumerist glamour where post-hippie and high-fashion iconographies mix, is disturbed by the vague, sweet, and slightly nauseating combined scent of all the organic and inorganic substances, vapors, and chemicals present. Perhaps even more of a disturbance for some is the physical exertion the audience goes through by simply sitting on the floor (or standing) next to it all for over four straight hours. Through these objects and their visual, olfactory, tactile, kinetic, and affective effects (enthusiasm and nausea, laughter and exertion), Spångberg and his dancers immediately destroy any illusion that dance is that art of harmonious flows and of "empathic res-



Figure 2. A tall panel, paints, and brushes were available to spectators throughout the piece. Mårten Spångberg's *La Substance*, but in English. MoMA PS1, 12 January 2014. Performers: Linda Blomquist, Aron Blom, Ludvig Daae, Yoann Durant, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Sandra Lolax, Linnéa Martinsson, Pontus Pettersson, Rebecka Stillman, Hanna Strandberg, Marika Troili. (Photo by Charles Roussel)

onance" (to use an expression in vogue in certain contemporary dance discourse) predicated on a shared humanity or shared corporality, or even a shared subjectivity. There is absolutely no place for empathy between subjects here. Instead, there is a rather demanding request for "spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translations in order to appropriate 'the story' and make





Figure 3. The choreography made occasional references to Merce Cunningham and the backdrop to high-fashion logos. Mårten Spångberg's *La Substance*, but in English. MoMA PS1, 12 January 2014. Performers: Linda Blomquist, Aron Blom, Ludvig Daae, Yoann Durant, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Sandra Lolax, Linnéa Martinsson, Pontus Pettersson, Rebecka Stillman, Hanna Strandberg, Marika Troili. (Photo by Charles Roussel)

it their own story,” as Jacques Rancière would say, in his notorious essay *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009:22)—an essay, by the way, that Spångberg himself commissioned the philosopher to write, and that serves quite well Spångberg’s own beliefs of what it means for an audience to participate in a work. Never has an artist so clearly promoted his own views on his art via such a high-profile proxy.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, what matters more than the universality of dance as a corporeal language is the activation through dance of endlessly dissensual critical thinking—as long as this particular mode of production of thought remains, within

the performance situation, a one-way street, coming from the artwork and heading towards the audience. In other words, audience participation will not disturb the flow of the work, its formalist and conceptual integrity. The issue *La Substance, but in English* brings to this whole question of a Rancièrian/Spångbergian emancipated spectatorship in dance is that, of course, there is no “story” to be built—neither by the choreographer nor by the audience—only images and sounds and smells and sweat and bodies and movement and objects and forces to be assembled, and disassembled, as images of thought. If the process is stren-

1. A version of “The Emancipated Spectator” was first published in English in *Artforum*, March 2007. A footnote to that edition states: “‘The Emancipated Spectator’ was originally presented, in English, at the opening of the Fifth International Summer Academy in Frankfurt, on August 20th, 2004” (Rancière 2007:280). A footnote to the reprinting of the essay in the homonymous Verso book (2009) acknowledges by name the one who had made the original invitation: “The invitation [...] came from Swedish performer and choreographer Mårten Spångberg” (Rancière 2009:1). Spångberg confided to me a few times, that once he read Rancière’s book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (the first French edition is from 1987), he knew he had found a philosopher who could defend the idea that participation does not require active physical engagement of the audience, but a passive intellectual activity. For a critique of this “passive partaking” or “disengaged methexis,” see Lepecki (2013).

uous, Spångberg is generous: he leaves at the edges of the linoleum flooring, bridging the performance space and the surrounding space where spectators sit on the floor or lie down, cases of beer (the red and white of Budweiser 12-packs works beautifully with the preponderant blues and greens of the objects more in front). Spångberg also offers a large and tall white panel, defining one of the scene's boundaries, and several buckets of water-based paint, and brushes, so that whoever wishes to fill in a large semi-abstract, semi-childish, drawing by Spångberg on that wall is welcome to do so at any time during the piece. I was there on that wall for quite some time, and the experience of a relaxed and dis-engaged relation to the performance became quite important to me since it allowed me to realize how, no matter what I did, the work would not be affected. It had its autonomy; it was perfectly indifferent to my actions. Not to be creative, just to pass time: this is quite liberating in times of neoliberal high-performance anxiety, making what *La Substance* offers us such an increasingly rare gift. Importantly, there is no explicit invitation for the audience to participate in painting, or to drink the beer. The stuff is just there. What to do with them is up to us to decide.

Time and criticality and geometry then—and also carefully choreographed group dances with a strong emphasis on unison movements. The choreography (with several references to Cunningham, as well as to pop music videos) is occasionally traversed by unruly uprisings. A kind of impersonal force cuts across choreographic composition and composure. In these interruptions, one starts to suspect what the substance referred to in the title might be: not a material element, but an affective force that powers and animates and criss-crosses both the organic and the inorganic. Speculative philosophy meets the nonhuman agency of the thing. In 2003, Spångberg created his solo *Powered by Emotion*, where the same affective principle applied. With *La Substance, but in English*, the level of depth in



Figure 4. *Lots of stuff and a microphone at the ready. Mårten Spångberg's La Substance, but in English. MoMA PS1, 12 January 2014. Performers: Linda Blomquist, Aron Blom, Ludvig Daae, Yoann Durant, Emma Kim Hagdahl, Sandra Lolax, Linnéa Martinsson, Pontus Pettersson, Rebecka Stillman, Hanna Strandberg, Marika Troili. (Photo by Charles Roussel)*

his affective choreography is mastered at a whole new level, where the impersonal takes precedence. As Brian Massumi clarifies in his classic essay “The Autonomy of Affect,” emotion and affect are quite different entities, and affect is autonomous from the cultural-normative framings of intense sensations: “Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, [...] into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. [...] Affect is unqualified. As such it is not ownable or recognizable, and is thus resistant to critique” (1995:88).

But...what might be the English unqualifiable affect of *La Substance*?

From the moment we enter the space until the piece is over, songs almost never stop. I can only think of Pina Bausch's pieces after *Palermo, Palermo* as being so dramaturgically and choreographically dependent upon a non-stop string of songs. The obvious difference is that instead of Bausch's “world music” approach, Spångberg's soundtrack is overwhelmingly composed of black American hip hop in its multiple variations: from Junglepussy to Rihanna, from Beyoncé to Kendrick Lamar (whose “Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe” is looped at a certain point for a good half hour). Songs, mostly black songs, suture the whole

performance. Sheer verbal and rhythmic force powerfully produces an altogether different substance: a black American substance whose sonic impact radically inflects the choreographic images and objects onstage. Spångberg sits on the same exact spot throughout the entire piece, laptop in hand, and keeps shooting out messages on Facebook, email, or Skype to his dancers (we can hear all the familiar sounds these applications emit as they perform their task, a really smart indication of the economies of communication and time underpinning the performance). But he also manages the songs from a very long playlist. Meanwhile, the singer Yoann Durant, sitting with the audience (sometimes it is impossible to distinguish him from the regular public), completes *La Substance*'s resonant image. Microphone in hand, mostly on his knees, and throughout most of the performance, he sings those same songs, those same lyrics rather unassumingly (it takes a while for one to notice this other voice, this subtle dis/resonance). A necessarily imperfect sonic overlap occurs, adding a distinct vibration, a disjunctive synthesis, a dis-harmonics, a third element, an accent to the songs. Through a sonic interplace, another substance enters the fray. We may call it the impersonal timbre or fugitive sound.

This third element, expressing an encounter between black hip hop re-resonated via the clash of Durant's voice with the recorded soundtracks, is, for me, the substance of *La Substance*: pure affect—not ownable, autonomous, impersonal. It can only emerge through the mutual performance of live and recorded singing; it is neither of the singer nor of the recorded songs; it is utterly impersonal and really grainy, non-spectacular and unruly. Thus, underneath choreography, songwriting, glittering high-fashion logos, the authority of the author, the sexy virtuosic techniques of the dancers, the choreographic references to Cunningham's geometries, the sudden eruption of a balletic port-de-bras, the subtle stench of all the chemicals and butter and opened beer cans—underneath it all, and powering it all, as a sweet nausea, a black substance operates its political-affective force: “those mutations that are always also a regendering or transgen-

dering” where “lies the black thing that cuts the regulative, governant force of (the) understanding (and even of those understandings of blackness to which black people are given since fugitivity escapes even the fugitive),” as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney propose (2013:50). The political-philosophical unconscious of Spångberg's tour de force is this black power—it is an unconscious, however, that is not Spångberg's; it is an unconscious that does not belong to an author, nor to a subject, nor even to the subject of the “creative collective.” The unconscious names the assembler and producer of all those affects already crisscrossing the undercommons of our existence, the movement of things independent from their masters and their encounters, and the “anachoreographic” (Harney and Moten 2013:50) collisions produced. Under the dome, under the glitter and shiny bottles of Listerine and Monster and Coke, the black (under)ground thuds its sounds, proposing a force no choreography can control. One may only unleash it and brace up for what it makes happen: dance's black matter, its dark physics, beyond emancipation.

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## **“Generosity That Can’t Be Mistaken For Kindness” Mårten Spångberg and the Vibe of Contemporaneity**

By Andrew Friedman, Yale Theatre Magazine

The baseline of Kendrick Lamar’s “Bitch Don’t Kill My Vibe” was clearly audible in the cafeteria of MOMA PS1. Fifty-yards away, across the museum’s gravel court yard the song shook the floor of a Volkswagen-sponsored white geodesic dome. Inside, the art, dance, and performance worlds lounged on wadded-up blankets, played on their phones, drank beer, cuddled with their friends and, on occasion, paid attention to *La Substance, but in English*, Mårten Spångberg’s four-and-a-half-hour work of choreography, presented in conjunction with the 2014 American Realness Festival. Navigating the floor of spectators—like crossing a beach crowded with sunbathers—I found my friend who brought me up to speed: in my absence, “the smoke machine went off a little.” I was certain that I had missed something beautiful and entirely unimportant. A thin fog hung low across the silver-insulation flooring, drifting over Arizona Iced Tea cans, ribbons of blue goo, Axe deodorant, a pyramid of stacked butter, a trio of humidifiers, giant fuzzy-white dice, cylinders of mystery liquid, and piles of clothes that the eight performers languidly changed in and out of until each became a collage of competing fabrics and styles. The dancers, like the survivors of a fourth-grader’s beauty clinic, wore a riot of sparkles and chunky makeup—streams of glitter tears, bright orange eyebrows, a disturbingly pinkish chin—crowned with a jumble of wigs, braids, headbands, feathers and hair dye. Intermittently, their slow-motion behaviors erupt into dance.

Without making overt demands on the spectators’ attention, everything has the potential to deliver sensorial information: lazily painting one’s arms with Marshmallow Fluff, dropping Mentos into bottles of Diet Coke to volcanic effect, a peace sign constructed from remote controls, rustling cardboard in a box,



rearranging oranges on the floor, or the flash of balletic structures undergirding the movements. There are infinite opportunities for engagement but little direction. The perceptual horizontalism of Gertrude Stein's conception of "landscape" plays is a clear influence, offering a terrain of differing modes and speeds of traversing and, perhaps most importantly, one that cannot be misunderstood.<sup>i</sup> Upstage, hangs a massive tapestry of reflective gold and silver panels. Stitched together with the flags of high-end clothing designers—Chanel, Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent—the backdrop trembles with each pulse of bass. Overhead, a mobile of giant gold pot leaves sways, bouncing arcs of light through the haze. Nestled in the front row of the crowd, Yoann Durant, one of Spångberg's many collaborators, sings over each song as he reads the lyrics from a laptop. Switching from rap to pop, he faces the action; his gently amplified voice rides over the recorded tracks as if the entire performance were his own elaborate karaoke fantasy. Spångberg sits stage left floor, conspicuously cuing the show. He signals to the dancers using cryptic hand gestures and relays with Yoann via emails, texts, and Skype whose signature swooshes and ring-tones are audibly broadcast through the room. Like a self-described "mechanic" who hasn't invented the machine he tinkers with, but keeps it running smoothly, Spångberg busies himself tweaking sound levels or fetching an errant prop.<sup>ii</sup> Behind him, a mix of performers and spectators color in the outline of a huge psychedelic mural that, as if willed by the steady undertow of the performance itself, was completed as the evening drew to an ethereal close.

The mingling of the quietly profound and disposable is a hallmark of Spångberg's performances. Constructed from the products, behaviors, and technologies of twenty-first century popular and underground culture, the rich ambiguity of Spångberg's works distinguishes them from the standard juxtaposition of 'high' and 'low' references for ironic or dissonant effect. Neither critiquing nor reveling in this milieu, Spångberg reassembles the artifacts of contemporary life into alien habitats that are natural to its performers and obliquely familiar to audiences. The animate and inanimate objects that comprise his environments are governed by Spångberg's conception of choreography as a practice not exclusive to constructing dances, but as an expansive strategy for the organization of time and space.<sup>iii</sup> Sidestepping entertainment, the ambition is to create works that "leaves the audience alone."<sup>iv</sup> The compositions permit audiences to take in the event with as little or as much attention as they wish and without demanding they check their daily viewing habits at the door. Multi-focal modes of spectatorship are encouraged for performer and spectator alike: both use their phones, talk to each other, wander in and out of the space, take photos or videos of the action, eat, drink, and sleep. Uninterested in keeping spectators busy with amusement, critique, analysis, or virtuosity, sensorial experience presides in what Gia Kourlas called, "a little like watching a sunset."<sup>v</sup> The multiple and particular practices of engagement foster a sense of contemporaneity, what Peter Osborne identifies as "a coming together of different but equally 'present' temporalities or 'times', a temporal unity in disjunction."<sup>vi</sup> Embracing the partiality of one's own perception is the rule of both Spångberg's work and contemporaneity, which shrug off totalizing narratives born of Modernity and Postmodernity, as well as attempts to instrumentalize people



through appeals to common experience. Or, as Spångberg polemically asserts, “something political [in performance] is never contemporary, it’s just more of the same,” while evocation of opinions and feelings are similarly dismissed as “conventional, commissioned and co-produced.”<sup>vii</sup> Yet, for Spångberg, the shows are an attempt to “produce something that neo-liberalism doesn’t know how to cope with, at all.”<sup>viii</sup> The task requires eschewing art’s standard political strategies—especially critique and discourse—that are quickly co-opted and defanged by neo-liberalism, and to which audiences have grown accustomed. Instead of political utility, Spångberg delivers experience, which in the case of *La Substance*, is well summarized in Kendrick Lamar’s repeated chorus:

I can feel your energy from two planets away  
I got my drink, I got my music  
I would share it but today I’m yelling  
Bitch don’t kill my vibe, bitch don’t kill my vibe  
Bitch don’t kill my vibe, bitch don’t kill my vibe<sup>ix</sup>

Defined by its ability “to transmit or express (a feeling, attitude, etc.) to others in the form of intuitive signals,” as well as “perceive on the basis of such signals,” vibe—the pop-cultural equivalent of affect—never crosses over into feeling or language leaving devoid of political applicability.<sup>x</sup> Spångberg’s performances produce an abundance of vibe, filling the void of discernable narrative, conflict, or mirrored subjectivity.

Given the abstraction of such concepts—not to mention their echo of Gilles Deleuze among other theorists—it will come as little surprise that Spångberg’s interest in dance was shaped in the academy, as a joint Ph.D. student of both the University College of Dance in Stockholm and the architecture department of the Royal Institute of Technology.<sup>xi</sup> Spångberg’s career in dance began, however, as critic. Writing for Sweden’s daily papers, *Aftonblandet* and *Dagens Nyheter* from 2002-07, he is well tutored in the medium’s history as well as its institutional interdependence. His somewhat marginal status in comparison to many of his peers is, in part, the product of his lack of formal training. Working from the outside in, Spångberg has actively shaped the European dance and performance scenes by wearing numerous hats—curator, critic, theorist, professor, choreographer, and lecturer—since the mid-90s. The expanse of his engagements, according to the artist, also serves as a necessary form of self-authorization in lieu of practical education.<sup>xii</sup>

International Festival, a project spearheaded by Spångberg and the architect Tor Lindstrand in 2004, is founded on the overlap between choreography and architecture as practices concerned with spatial organization. The pair have collaborated on twenty-two works ranging from feature-length films and installations, to an open-air market and a temporary television station that made daily broadcasts to over a half-a-million homes in Tarfia, Spain.<sup>xiii</sup> *The Theatre* (2007) is a performance of architecture in which a functional one-hundred-and-

eighty seat theatre is designed and constructed by International Festival collaborators upon commission. The result is a freestanding structure that both houses and is itself a performance that blurs distinctions between what objects and bodies do.<sup>xiv</sup>

Spångberg has equally been integral to the launch and continuation of *The Swedish Dance History*, an annual, collaboratively created book documenting the year in Swedish dance in which all submissions, in any form, are accepted. The resulting texts are distributed free of charge at festivals throughout the world. These volumes function, like much of Spångberg's work, as an attempt to celebrate the contributions of practitioners, but also as part of a grander ambition to develop a broader, more interdisciplinary, and artist-driven field for the performing arts. *Spångbergianism* (2011), however, is the author's best-known text. The one-hundred-and-seventy-three page book, culled from the artist's blog posts, is a searing polemic dedicated equally to theorizing new modes of producing dance in the twenty-first century and to critiquing of the discipline's standard models and practices.<sup>xv</sup> Available as a free download, the book spawned a series of lectures in which Spångberg—who defines all of his works, including his talks, as forms of choreography—spoke uninterrupted for up to four hours. Dance scholar André Lepecki summed up one such lecture as having, “brilliant moments as there are infuriating ones; moments of deep resonance and of deep dissonance; moments one wants to correct a date or a wrong reference to a book's title and moments we wish we could be taping it all, for later consultation and slower pondering.”<sup>xvi</sup> The torrents of language impact the thoughts and perceptions of the listener not by virtue of argumentation, but, as Lepecki reports, like a “parasite,” worming its way into the “host”/listener who mutates under its influence.<sup>xvii</sup>

The contagion brought on by washes of sensory information applies equally to Spångberg's performance landscapes. Rudi Laermans calls this mode of nonhierarchical composition, “choreography in general,” comprised of “mutually interacting forces or movements of a various nature that affect each other within a governed plane of consistency.”<sup>xviii</sup> The approach, for Laermans, provokes the question, “not ‘what does it mean?’ but ‘how does it work?’” Spångberg aspires to render both queries unanswerable. Within Spångberg's works, the question becomes one of potential; what can happen when we aren't waiting for something to happen? The potentiality of choreography, rather than its illustration of discourse or composition, preoccupies Spångberg's works from 2008 to the present.

Due to his concern for the total performance environment, Spångberg's works are generally categorized as *Konzepttanz* (conceptual dance), and alongside artists like Jérôme Bel, Tino Seghal, Xavier Le Roy, and Meg Stuart. Johannes Birringer defines the movement, which started in Western Europe in the mid-1990s, by its attempts to “examine the medium of dance, to lay bare the mechanics of the production process and negate its aesthetic modes of representation.”<sup>xix</sup> Although sharing a body of aesthetics, André Lepecki reminds that chief among the concerns for those associated with *Konzepttanz* is the rejection of the moniker itself.<sup>xx</sup>

Nonetheless, the term has utility for Lepecki as a link between the presumed preoccupations of *Konzepttanz* and the preceding foci of conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>xxi</sup> Spångberg's practice, begun in the mid-90s and based in Stockholm, is located within the crosshairs of the movement. As a result, he goes to great pains to distance himself from the association, noting that he presents concepts, but the productions themselves are not "conceptual."<sup>xxii</sup> At first blush the distinction seems semantic, but Spångberg's parsing of 'concepts' and 'conceptual' is integral to his work and, in part, accounts for the strange contrast between the theoretical inspirations for his projects and the experience of watching them.

Conceptual dance's fascination with choreographic, performative, and spectatorial structures echoes the critiques launched by post-modern theory and art practice against the autonomous artwork of Modernism. Within the development of dance, Lepecki sees *Konzepttanz* as engaging the innovations of Pina Bausch and Yvonne Rainer through the former's "distrust of representation, and an insistence on the dancer's presence" and the latter's "suspicion of virtuosity and the reduction of unessential props and scenic elements," as well as their mutual affinity for visual and performance art.<sup>xxiii</sup> Indebted as Spångberg is to such innovations, his work strategically diverts from this lineage with respect to Bausch's presence and Rainer's minimalism. The layering of minute gestures, stuff, and atmosphere make the productions counter intuitively maximalist. Amid the spectacle and sensation, dancerly presence and dancing in general—if impossible to wholly erase—are recast as one among many choreographed objects. Equity between dance, the dancers, and the other components of the space is established without egalitarian sentiment, but instead with a desire to de-emphasize the beauty, creativity, and subjectivity of the dancer. The discreet but intertwined elements, "staged concepts" as Spångberg calls them, "withdrawal" from audiences rather than illustrate for them, providing a potentiality, an open field, an opportunity.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Recent scholarship has taken on the appeal of potentiality in what Laura Cull has termed the "performance of immanence."<sup>xxv</sup> Traced through theatre and performance, Gilles Deleuze's understanding of immanence, according to Cull, eliminates a "fundamental separation or hierarchy between the nature of words and things, body and mind, subject and object, representation and the real, theory and practice."<sup>xxvi</sup> Yet, like Spångberg's compositions, the elements maintain a level of differentiation through what Cull terms "processuality," what Spångberg calls the creation of a "sauce" in which the ingredients combine into a unique blend that simultaneously retains the phantoms of its constitute parts.<sup>xxvii</sup> Given Deleuze's influence on dance and performance scholarship, it is perhaps unsurprising how central the theorist is to Spångberg's work.<sup>xxviii</sup> His lectures, essays, books, and program notes, and casual conversation, are steeped in French post-structural thought. He quotes from this body of knowledge with ease and regularity, yet, his productions, clearly a product of this thinking, have an airiness, an emptiness that signals the evacuation of the conceptual that seemingly runs counter to his theoretical inspirers. The prominence of theory without the baggage of illustration is integral to Peter Osborne's definition of contemporary art as "postconceptual

art.”<sup>xxix</sup> Its chief characteristic is the demonstration of its own existence by “projecting contemporaneity – the establishment of connections within the living present – as a task to be achieved.”<sup>xxx</sup> Combining opaque images and gestures with a spectatorial permissiveness, Spångberg’s choreography conjures a space for the “living present” through the production of connections. This sense of contemporaneity circulating in Spångberg’s work can be traced from as far back as 2008.

*Slowfall* (2008) is the first of a series of works to engage the question of potentiality. Inspired by chakra breathing and drawing, the eighty-minute solo takes its name from a variety of confetti whose circular movement yields a fluttery and protracted descent. Standing naked before a white wall, Spångberg, underscored by chirping crickets, moves into a series of poses and, intermittently and methodically, draws images in an amateurish outline upon the backdrop: a yellow banana, a smoking skillet, green and red diamonds, a family of elephants. Juxtaposing the meditative pace are eruptions of stage smoke, Coldplay’s melancholic rock anthem “Yellow” (2000) and Deep Purple’s anti-Vietnam War crusher “Child of Time” (1970). But these jolts of energy never affect Spångberg’s performance, which proceeds like a physicalized drone, never modulating even while switching between the tasks of breathing and illustration. The breach or possible relation between behavior and context is left for the audience to ponder or produce as they sit on the floor.

*Slowfall* features the chief structural and aesthetic characteristics that appear in Spångberg’s following works: the production of space and a beguiling performance affect. Without the demarcating structure of seats, spectators must negotiate the space and their relation to one another in it: the bored recline, the attention hungry sit sideways, inserting their profile into the stage picture, all the while sharing the same light as the stage area itself. Meanwhile, Spångberg, and his performers strike a hybrid pose towards the onlookers and each other that registers as equal parts stony vacuity and a peacefulness prone to fits of playful whistles and squeals, screams and smirks. Despite keeping near-constant eye contact with the audience and each other, the performers’ intentions remain masked. These looks lead to an array of actions: snapping photos of the audience or oneself, joining or shifting a dance in progress, or simply zoning out. Ranging from the fleeting to the uncomfortably long, these glances have a zoological air, like peering into a habitat populated by unthreatened animals who are available for inspection, but not without returning the favor. Yet these exchanges, not to mention seating arrangements, have none of the combative or utopian sentiments stemming from late sixties and seventies performance art, dance, and political theatre. The sense is not that the fourth-wall needs to be dismantled or that doing so fosters empathy, community, or intersubjective exchange. Mutual recognition instead summons the strange over the familiar, opening a gulf where other works might propose a bridge: “a generosity that can’t be mistaken for kindness.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

Nowhere is this strangeness more evident than in *Ride the Wave Dude* (2010) a collaboration between Spångberg and the Estonian choreographer and performer,

Krõõt Juurak. Designed as a “performance for dragons,” the production is a series of behaviors and gestures that unfold slowly to a constant soundtrack of pounding tribal-surf-rock drums.<sup>xxxii</sup> Dressed in swimsuits, Spångberg and Juurak sprinkle water on the audience, hold and display various objects made from cardboard, take a beer break, hoist dozens of cardboard flags taped to thin-wooden dowels, dissect the stage space with a web of strings, paint their limbs red, tape forks to the backs of their thighs, and display a series of placards decrying Woody Allen: “spit on Woody Allen’s space,” which they then do by spitting on a small cardboard house placed within a miniature landscape of makeshift hills and towns scattered around the stage. The behaviors suggest the secret culture of surfers or cave people or mythical giants, or, equally probable, an entertainment for dragons. The plurality of possibilities is, of course, intentional and designed to register differently for each audience member. Aesthetic reference points—60s Happening, Jack Smith’s object theatre, or the Judson Church—apply partially, but a clear correlation is lacking. Lineage, although traceable, is rendered enigmatic through Spångberg’s efforts to separate choreography and dance as the accepted *Pas de deux* of the medium, resulting in a sense of disjointedness.

*Epic* (2012) is the first presentation of Spångberg’s aesthetic concerns on a grand scale. At full length, the show runs over four hours and follows “eight autonomous solos” that overlap and intersect within a baffling *mise en scène* of scattered objects.<sup>xxxiii</sup> As with all of Spångberg’s works, the dances are assembled from fragmented traditions (ballet, hip-hop, modern), everyday behavior (smoking a joint, combing one’s hair), and the culturally iconic (boxing, Miley Cyrus’ now-infamous tongue wag). During rehearsals, the dancers produce the individual elements in response to a variety of prompts. The eclecticism of the material is further emphasized by Spångberg’s ordering. As with the other choreographic behaviors, probability and patterns are noticeable but difficult to predict. A stripped down *Jeté* is as likely to move into further ballet, become top-rock breakdancing, or dissolve into informal shrug. Variety, the continual shifting of perspective and tempo produce a variability of movement. Sequences often shift throughout the stage—what is upstage eventually appears downstage—drawing attention to different coordinates of the space and the body. Movements and gestures recur in full or as fragments among the dancers. Like the symptoms of a virus spreading through the performers, the symptoms morph in intensity and pattern as they infect.

A single song typically sustains each sequence. In *The Nature* (2013), Oasis’ mega-hit “Wonderwall” (1995) repeats for fifteen minutes as the four dancers wander in and out of the choreography, at times synchronizing, at others peeling off to swap clothes, cheer each other on, or follow a separate track of the routine only to reunite in a further mutation of the initial pattern. Although the entirety of the work is rigidly organized, a tension between freedom of expression and strictures persists. Even customary section dedicated to improvisation—found in *Epic*, *The Nature*, and *La Substance*—is meticulously scheduled and timed. Patterns, bits of scenography, behaviors, and costumes, reappear across productions. A process



Spångberg equates with upgrading operating systems, in which essential features are retained, but the overall look, feel, and organization are reconceived.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

When not dancing or engaged in other choreographed behavior, the performers shuffle through these worlds like packs of psychedelic zombies, their bodies distorted under a patchwork ill-fitted garments. The preponderance of brand-name products, logos, and popular music filling the environments, in conjunction with Spångberg's musings on capitalism and neo-liberalism, have led the works to be seen as commentaries on consumerism.<sup>xxxv</sup> As subtextless facades, Spångberg's choreography is more in league with other artists of life's surfaces—theatre makers Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller, video artist Ryan Trecartin, novelist Tao Lin, and filmmaker Harmony Korine to name a few—who have given up plumbing the mythical depths of human experience for efficacious meaning. Theirs are visions of existence thriving atop the horribly beautiful exteriors of contemporary cultures. An assertion of art's autonomy—not from social, political, and economic influence and structures—but from social, political, and economic utility. Or, as Spångberg rails, "Art is not in the world to be good, to help out, to make the world a better place, it is not here to be a lantern in the dark. Instead art and aesthetic experience is the opportunity to remain in the dark, to not be helpful, to not solve any problems but be just art, just an image beyond ethical prescriptions and well-meaning complacency."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Over three hours into *La Substance*, something like a climax occurs: Christina Aguilera's "Genie in a Bottle" (1999) thumps on a loop as all eight dancers weave in and out of a stretch of choreography that disintegrates whenever it verges towards coherence. Finally, the dancers synchronize, suturing together their disparate motions into a show-stopping routine of pop virtuosity. Yoann, head bobbing as he purrs over the lyrics, suddenly puts down the microphone and makes his way through the crowd towards the exit; the warm light of his smartphone illuminating a cigarette hung precariously from his lips. There must have been somewhere else, right then, that he wanted to be.

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- <sup>i</sup> See Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America* (1935; reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1985).
- <sup>ii</sup> Mårten Spångberg, interview with the author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>iii</sup> Interview with the author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>iv</sup> MoMa PS1 Sunday Sessions Event Description "A new commission by Mårten Spångberg, *La Substance, but in English*," *MoMa PS1 online*, February 6, 2014, <http://momaps1.org/calendar/view/478/>.
- <sup>v</sup> Gia Kourlas, "Kicking Back: Nature of Choreography Revised, With Beer Cans 'La Substance, but in English' Tweaks Consumerism," *New York Times online*, January 13, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/14/arts/dance/la-substance-but-in-english-tweaks-consumerism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/14/arts/dance/la-substance-but-in-english-tweaks-consumerism.html?_r=0).
- <sup>vi</sup> Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, (London: Verso, 2013), 22.
- <sup>vii</sup> Mårten Spångberg, *Spångbergianism*, (Self-Published, 2011), 44.
- <sup>viii</sup> Lyndsey Winship, "Mårten Spångberg, the bad boy of contemporary dance," *The Guardian online*, July 5, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jul/05/marten-spangberg-epic-dance>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Kendrick Lamar, *Bitch, Don't Kill My Vibe*, from *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City* © 2012 by Top Dawg, Aftermath, Interscope, compact disc.
- <sup>x</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "vibe," accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/247856?rskey=IX2VPk&result=2#eid>.
- <sup>xi</sup> "Curriculum Vitae," Mårten Spångberg's Official Website, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://martenspangberg.org/node/4>.
- <sup>xii</sup> Interview with Author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ibid. Accessed February 10, 2014.
- <sup>xiv</sup> For additional information of this and other International Festival projects see the Website: <http://international-festival.org>.
- <sup>xv</sup> A second Volume: *Spångbergianism II* is due to be released in 2014.
- <sup>xvi</sup> André Lepecki, "Parasitic Noisification: A Four-Part Dance Blog #4," *New York Live Arts Blog*, July 20, 2012, accessed January 30, 2014, <http://www.newyorklivearts.org/blog/?p=1894#more-1894>.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Rudi Laermans, "'Dance in General' or Choreographing the Public, Making Assemblages," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*, 13 no. 1, (2008): 13.
- <sup>xix</sup> Johannes Birringer, "Dance and Not Dance," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 27, no. 2, (2005): 21.
- <sup>xx</sup> André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 135.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Ibid. Lepecki.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Interview with author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> André Lepecki, "Concept and Presence: The Contemporary European Dance Scene," in *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter (New York: Routledge, 2004), 173.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Interview with author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Laura Cull *Theatres of Immanence: Deleuze and the Ethics of Performance*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid, 8.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Interview with author, February 17, 2014.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid, 3.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, 51.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Ibid, 23.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Epic Performance Description, Mårten Spångberg's Official Website, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://martenspangberg.org/node/32>.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Interview with author, February 7, 2014.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Performance Description, Mårten Spångberg's Official Website, accessed February 10, 2014, <http://martenspangberg.org/node/32>.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Interview with author, February 17, 2014.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> See, for example, Gia Kourlas, 'La Substance, but in English' Tweaks Consumerism." Jan. 13, 2014. And for a more critical take, Andy Horowitz, "Considering Alastair, Questioning Realness" <http://www.culturebot.org/2014/01/20493/considering-alastair-questioning-realness/>
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Mårten Spångberg, *Spångbergianism II*, (Self-Published: forthcoming, 2014), 21