



Artistic collaborations

Collaborations between artists from various disciplines are specific neither to contemporary dance nor even dance. In the West, from Ancient Greek times, the live show has been combined with music, song, dance and theatre. Even when dance is established as an autonomous art form, it is generally multi-disciplinary and brings together various artists.

In contemporary dance, collaborations between artists also develop and their methods multiply; they range from ongoing dialogues during the conception of the work, as Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker and the composer Thierry de Mey have done, to the total independence of each artist, as was the case with Merce Cunningham, the composer John Cage and the visual artist Robert Rauschenberg, while also including the cross contribution of a choreographer with a visual artist or a fashion designer responsible for the invention of a stage design or the costume design.

Sometimes, the choreographer comes to the field of dance having worked previously in another artistic field. Or, certain creators conceive choreography at the same time as another artistic proposal, for example José Montalvo, who directs films which are shown during his pieces. Lastly, the artists with whom the choreographers collaborate can also be put on stage and thus become performers.

But if artistic collaboration is sometimes found between two choreographers who are both creating the same work, it is also found, above all, in the relationship between the choreographer and his performer(s).

This theme proposes various examples of cross participation in the same process of creation and dialogue between the disciplines, from choreographer “couples” to the creations involving musicians or visual artists, as well as some atypical encounters on stage.

1. Choreographer - performer relationships

Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia – La minute du spectateur

Certain artists create in tandem, and over a long period of time. These collaborations deeply modify their way of working since the exchanges between them are decisive in the creative process. To create jointly, is to detach yourself from the solitary responsibility of the choreographer and to place the question of collaboration in the middle of the choreographic composition. Often, both the artists who work together take on the duties of choreographer, even if they have not worked exclusively in the field of dance.



Françoise and **Dominique Dupuy**, **Norbert** and **Nicole Corsino**, **Héla Fattoumi** and **Éric Lamoureux**, and even **Seydou Boro** and **Salia Sanou**, have all favoured this kind of creation *with two authors*. For more than fifteen years, **Joëlle Bouvier** and **Régis Obadia** have also designed their shows together. Differently to other pairs of choreographers, their creations firstly explored the concept of the couple, with a strong commitment to the duet and amorous passion. In addition, Joëlle Bouvier and Régis Obadia often performed their own pieces; the choreographic writing that they had worked out together resonated with the duet which they presented on the stage.

La danse, l'art de la rencontre

The choreographers **Dominique Hervieu** and **José Montalvo** met in 1981, founded their company in 1988 and created many shows together until 2011. In their pieces, they unite dance and film and work with dancers with backgrounds in various techniques (traditional, hip hop, contemporary, African, for example). The two artists also support collaborations with other choreographers working in other countries. In the short film ***La danse, l'art de la rencontre*** which she directed with José Montalvo, Dominique Hervieu asks Malian, Cambodian and Tunisian artists to create a duet in a place that symbolises their city. “Our work exalts a multi-ethnic world, the multiple sense of belonging, the plural identities” observes Dominique Hervieu in this film whose images testify to the encounter between several forms of dance in very disparate contexts.

Une douce imprudence

Eric Lamoureux and **Thierry Thieû Niang** are both dancers and choreographers. Generally, the former creates in tandem with **Héla Fattoumi** and the second alone. For ***Une douce imprudence***, which they describe as a “choreographic poem”, they decided to pool their experiences by favouring a delicate approach to dance where listening to the other is the key to one’s own involvement. The sharing of the moment and the sensitive dialogue are the driving forces of this collaborative duet.

A one-off meeting between two choreographers during a creation is not uncommon. **Mathilde Monnier** and **Maria La Ribot**, for example, created ***Gustavia*** while “being driven by shared reflections on the questions of the future of art and performance in particular”. Their show is influenced by the world of traditional burlesque. Such a collaboration implies a stimulating working relationship in which each person is simultaneously both author and performer, which is usually not the case.



Si c'est un nègre / autoportrait

“What happens between the performer and the author? For a long time this question has been at the heart of the works performed at the SACD at the Festival d'Avignon.”¹ Indeed the event “Le Vif du sujet” pairs up a choreographer and a dancer who are not accustomed to working together.

In *Si c'est un nègre / autoportrait*, **Faustin Linyekula** and **Sylvain Prunenec** dealt with the notion of territory. “I met Faustin Linyekula while going to see his show, *Triptyque sans titre*, just a few days after **Héla Fattoumi** suggested that I take part in Vif du sujet. I liked his show and his dancing. I found softness in them mingled with stubbornness and irony. His lucid look at his role of wandering African artist echoed the questions that I constantly asked myself during my time in Africa” says Sylvain Prunenec. He specifies the concerns of this creation as follows: “It matters to us that this meeting is not only that of a French dancer and an African choreographer, but rather that of two people on extremely different paths, who share the same curiosity of others, of the other, the same desire for movement, the desire to be moving.”²

This collaboration between performers and choreographers is an initial aspect of choreographic creation. In the case of performers directed by **Jérôme Bel**, it is the actual subject of the work which bears the name of the dancer who inspired it (*Véronique Doisneau*, *Cédric Andrieux*, for example).

2. Inseparable contributions

2008 Vallée

The choreographer **Mathilde Monnier** has collaborated with many people who do not belong to the field of dance, in particular the writer **Christine Angot**, the musician **Louis Sclavis**, the painter **Dominique Figarella** and the philosopher **Jean-Luc Nancy**. Each time it is a question of changing the choreographic process on the basis of these meetings and of thinking about the staging format in relation to other practices.

In 2006, Monnier and the singer **Philippe Katerine** created *2008 Vallée*. “There are songs being sung, but it is not only a concert; there is dancing, but it is not just a choreographic piece; stories are told, but it is not cinema. *2008 Vallée* is first of all a daydream created thirty years ago, in 1978, when Philippe Katerine was a little boy, a form of science fiction set in the near and distant future which would allow him to consider sounds, words, extrapolations based on concrete events and quite real situations of his future life” writes Antoine de Baecque about this piece. “The dancers

¹ Description of the event “Le Vif du sujet”, which then became “Sujets à vif”, and initiated the SACD (Société des auteurs et compositeurs dramatiques) – www.sacd.fr

² Interview with Sylvain Prunenec – www.kabako.org/creations/negre.html



like to sing and the singer starts to dance, each one encroaching on the register of the other with an amusing greediness, while the show teeters on a permanent tightrope, constantly on the edge of breakdown.”³ The form of the show is very original, especially as no hierarchy is established between the universe of the song and that of the contemporary dance.

Ma Lov'

Choreographers often invite the artists with whom they collaborate to perform on the stage. These partners generally endorse their own role, in counterpoint to the action of the dancers. In ***My Lov'***, choreography by **Bernardo Montet**, the four dancers share the stage with a painter and a musician. The painter draws forms on a blackboard which are erased from one moment to the next: “The painter, **Tamar Getter** only leaves traces in the memory of those who see her kinds of ready-made objects where characters drawn with chalk generate monsters embedded in reality, love letters where irony triumphs - writes the critic Fabienne Arvers⁴. With her, the dancers mark the finitude of human time by tracing long circles like the wearing down of a piece of chalk. The dance advances, blindly, the gaze obstructed by the long blackboard which cuts the mirror where the steps are duplicated, the jumps trembled, hammered, amplified by the echo of the electric guitar of **Eran Zur**, “the Israeli Lou Reed”, who is also present on the stage.”

À propos de Dominique Bagouet: Christian Boltanski

Collaborations between choreographers and visual artists are frequent. Dance and the visual arts are two art forms where the visual dimension is an important factor, even if the concerns of each process fall under extremely different contexts. The choreographer **Hervé Robbe** worked with the visual artist **Richard Deacon** to create ***Factory 93***. The two artists then decided to break with frontal space; instead they favoured a non-traditional stage space to question the relationship between the spatial position of the spectator and his reception of the work.

Dominique Bagouet also collaborated with many artists, in particular **Christian Boltanski** on ***Le Saut de l'Ange***. With regard to this collaboration, the visual artist declared: “I played my part of destabiliser to the full.”⁵ The world of dance is foreign to him and this is an asset for him. In the film ***À propos de Dominique Bagouet***, he testifies as follows: “I believe that the problem of dance is that the dancers are doing a very difficult job. They are very, very young people in the world of dance. And I think that it is sometimes necessary that they see external people who know nothing about this world.”

³ Antoine de Baecque, *2008 Vallée* – www.theatre-contemporain.net/spectacles/2008-Vallee

⁴ Fabienne Arvers, “Ma Lov'”, *Les Inrockuptibles*, 3 May 2001 – www.lesinrocks.com

⁵ Christian Boltanski, quoted by Chantal Aubry (*Bagouet*, Editions Bernard Coutaz, Arles, 1989, p. 81)



Le Défilé

Writers, philosophers, visual artists, musicians and singers are all potential artistic partners for choreographers. Sometimes a fashion designer can also be a potential partner, like **Jean Paul Gaultier**, for example, who designed the costumes for **Régine Chopinot**'s piece ***Le Défilé*** (The Fashion Show) in 1985. The choreographer had already collaborated with him in 1983 on the creation ***Délices*** for which he had also designed the costumes; but ***Le Défilé*** is a noticeably different piece because it is built according to rules of the fashion show. In this piece, the fusion of dance and fashion is not limited to the costumes worn by the dancers; it also influences the temporal and spatial course of the choreography. For Jean Paul Gaultier, there are several common points between his artistic approach and that of Régine Chopinot: "I know that there are certain movements which she would make her dancers do which were gestures that one could find sometimes ugly or vulgar, not at all aesthetic for a ballet. But she managed to make it into something beautiful. That became beautiful and interesting and it was a little bit like the process I had with the clothes."⁶ The collaboration between the two artists lasted until 1994 and was renewed in 2012 for the creation of the piece ***Very Wet*** at the Festival d'Avignon.

Ma Mère l'Oye

If choreographers invite creators from other artistic fields to invest themselves in their creations, the reverse is also true. The composer and filmmaker **Thierry de Mey** has often collaborated with the Belgian choreographers **Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker**, **Wim Vandekeybus** and **Michèle-Anne de Mey**. He is very interested in the transfer of compositional methods from one artistic field to another. He sees dance, film and music as being in a constant dialogue. For him, the camera is moving, the music adds rhythm to the images and the body creates accents and dynamics. This is why he invited around fifty choreographers and dancers to be part of the film ***Ma Mère l'Oye (Mother Goose)***. Here, Thierry de Mey tackles the world of the tales of Charles Perrault which he accompanies with the music of Maurice Ravel. Many dancers and choreographers, including **Thomas Hauert**, **Brice Leroux**, **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui**, Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker and Michèle-Anne de Mey throw themselves into these tales. Thierry de Mey films them in a forest where they become many characters who come to life, incarnate and evaporate.

⁶ "Le défilé – Jean Paul Gaultier/Régine Chopinot", Arte – www.arte.tv/fr/le-defile-jean-paul-gaultierregine-chopinot



Credits :

Extracts selection

Geisha Fontaine

Texts

Geisha Fontaine

Production

Maison de la Danse

Author's biography :

Dancer and choreographer (company "Mille Plateaux associés", with Pierre Cottreau), but also researcher in dance and doctor in philosophy, Geisha Fontaine is notably the author of the book *Les Danses du temps* (CND, collection Recherches, 2004) and of the accompanying booklet of the teaching tool *La Danse contemporaine en questions* co-produced by the National Dance Center and the Institut français in 2014 and from which this Parcours was written in the Numeridance collections.

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