



## Genesis of works

For the choreographer Mathilde Monnier, “at the beginning of a project, you should just have to write: “Here are the desires, the statement of the desires of this project...” You should just describe a space, an idea, make messy notes, have a notebook, an image, or describe a movement, a landscape, make something opaque, a mess...”<sup>1</sup> And yet, no matter what the artist could say about genesis of their project, she warns, “what you read in the statement of intent is never what you will see.”

In fact, a dance performance is generally created in several stages, from the moment when an initial desire is stated, which launches the project, to that of the first performance. What exactly is the starting point of a choreographic work? What motivates an artist to begin a new project and to then devote themselves to it for several months?

The course of the creative process varies appreciably depending on the choreographer. And, in contemporary dance, the choice of the process to be implemented forms an integral part of the creation. Depending on the artists, the various stages (design, structuring, rehearsals) overlap, are consecutive or combined. They do not necessarily have the same importance. For some, the design phase will be decisive, just like the initial idea. For others, it will be that of the rehearsals and the principles implemented as the show is developed in the dance studio.

The work with the dancers sometimes plays a large role in the structuring of a work or, on the contrary, more than anything allows what was decided in advance by the choreographer to materialise. Lastly, certain proposals, in particular in “composition in real time” or in improvisation, are based on the development of choreography in front of the audience.

These are some of the various methods for the “creation” of works which this thema proposes to explore.

### 1. Points of departure

#### ***Babel (Words)***

Sometimes a creation is inspired by myths. According to its playwright, the show ***Babel (Words)*** “takes as a starting point the precise moment in the account of the Tower of Babel where God punishes those who built a tower on His behalf, causing chaos by dividing them according to different languages, cultures and countries”<sup>2</sup>. For this creation, the choreographer **Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui** and the director **Damien Jalet** brought together eighteen artists from thirteen countries, speaking fifteen languages and representing seven religions; they become the contemporary witnesses of the

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<sup>1</sup> Mathilde Monnier, Jean-Luc Nancy, *Allitérations – Conversations sur la danse*, Galilée, 2005 p. 75 and 76

<sup>2</sup> Description of the creation – press kit



effects of this mythical moment where the men lose their common language and are distinguished according to his cultural and geographical origins. During the performance, the starting point is inverted little by little and what is common to all becomes once again the strong element of our humanity.

### ***Faux mouvement***

The starting point of a choreography can relate mainly to the body. The main idea of the creation ***Faux mouvement*** deals with this question: what are the concerns and necessities of physical engagement? For the choreographer **Fabrice Lambert**, part of the answer lies in taking into account what are often called "false moves" (Faux mouvements). He decides to devote himself to an exploration of the accidental and of what eludes us bodily. It could be the physical treatment of slips of the tongue in language! The concept of "false" is a factor of discovery here. This concern leads the critic Gérard Mayen to ask the following: "When he works on the concept of false moves, isn't Lambert engaging with the most noble art of trompe-l'oeil: an act of pure illusion, yet able to distort reality?"<sup>3</sup>

### ***Une hypothèse de réinterprétation***

**Rita Quaglia** was inspired to create ***Une hypothèse de réinterprétation*** after enjoying a performance that used several dancers. Her project consists "in occupying the stage space in the dual position of performer and spectator, to make the space of the gaze and the space of the performance a single place, to simultaneously transmit a spectator's powerful experience and the performer's desire"<sup>4</sup>. Rita Quaglia decides to locate her creation between the form of documentary and that of a performance. The dancer certainly questions herself on her function of spectator, but also on her profession of performer: "The work not only scrutinises my memory, but also those of the performers who have participated in the original creation, performers whom I interviewed individually to better understand how they confronted the various proposals for a work and how with each performance, they worked closely together to make the choreographic material comprehensible on stage." The creation is built on her desire to compare the roles of the spectator, the dancer and the creator. Her concern lies in the reinterpretation of a collective work by a single witness-carrier.

### ***Mammame***

Sometimes a work which they have created in the past prompts a choreographer to come up with a new version of it. **Jean-Claude Gallotta** presented ***Mammame*** in 1985. He updated this initial creation in 1998 by presenting it as a re-creation and then

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<sup>3</sup> Gérard Mayen, "Faux Mouvement", *Danser*, May-June 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Rita Quaglia, description of the creation - [www.avantscene.com](http://www.avantscene.com)



turning it into an adaptation for young audiences, entitled *L'Enfance de Mammame*, in 2002.

“Jean-Claude Gallotta wanted to explore this idea of transmission between the generations in more depth by adapting his choreography for an audience of children (...). *L'Enfance de Mammame* is thus the story of a group of Mammames who live in the theatre and worship the spotlight. They keep themselves warm under the light but one day, mysteriously, says Gallotta, the spotlight switches off and disappears. The Mammames must then endure the cold and the sadness. There is a solution however: a legend says that by creating certain dances, lots of different ones, the spotlight will return.”<sup>5</sup> From an initial dance, offspring, stories, extensions and variants emerge.

### *Faune Fomitch / Variation*

Many choreographers create using a historical dance work as a reference. **Michel Kelemenis** created *Faune Fomitch*<sup>6</sup> in 1988. It is a contemporary version of *L'Après-midi d'un faune (The Afternoon of a Faun)*, the famous ballet by **Vaslav Nijinsky**. He then created *Faune Fomitch / variation* with the dancer Thomas Birzan in October 2011. In 1988, the concern of the “solo” form was the focus for Michel Kelemenis and his transmission of the role to another performer in 2011 became an ambiguous moment. Indeed, Michel Kelemenis assimilated *Faune Fomitch* at “the moment of rupture where Nijinsky, in becoming a choreographer, destroyed his own image of a dancer”<sup>7</sup>. It was therefore the implementation of a personal situation. The transmission to another dancer modifies the initial issue and introduces a real variation into work. The work is again inspired by a previous choreography, but with a different intention.

## 2. The processes of composition

### *Rosas danst Rosas*

There are obviously multiple methods of structuring a choreographic work, and one of them, the principle of repetition, is frequently used in contemporary dance. **Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker** has made extensive use of this, to which even the title of her piece *Rosas danst Rosas* testifies. The Belgian choreographer works on the repetition of a phrase of movements and on its variations in time and space. The same vocabulary is deployed in many forms: “We used simplicity as a way of arousing more intense emotions (...). The music conforms to a very strict temporal structure and the choreography followed the same purely mathematical structures, but within this choreography, four quite alive people moved. Caught in this “infernal machine”, each glance, each smile, each sign of tiredness or, quite simply, the presence of these four

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<sup>5</sup> Description of *L'Enfance de Mammame* - [www.gallotta-danse.com](http://www.gallotta-danse.com)

<sup>6</sup> Vaslav Nijinsky's second name was Fomitch.

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.kelemenis.fr](http://www.kelemenis.fr)



dancers gave the show its tangible and enthralling character.”<sup>8</sup> The repetition becomes thus a means of giving a detail all of its place, but it is also a hypnotic machine which holds the spectator in the suspense of what will change.

### ***Tempo 76***

Another process of choreographic composition is that of unison. It was strongly questioned, from the beginning of the 1980s, by many creators, undoubtedly through mistrust for the phenomena of mass behaviour and certain shows where everyone does the same thing at the same time – army, traditional ballet, huge processions. However, many choreographers work with unison, in particular **Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker** who used it liberally in her first creations.

In ***Tempo 76***, the choreographer **Mathilde Monnier** wanted – in her turn – “to reinterpret a forsaken aesthetic form in order to scrutinise it, to divert it from its initial context and to take it through an adventurous, meaningful process”. She feels that “we live awkwardly with the unison of the world. We try to cling to the rhythm of a world which escapes us, through variation, intervals, realignment, idiorythmy, arrhythmia”<sup>9</sup>. Unison can also be a beautiful way of pooling together, a sharing of form, space and moment. It comes into its own in certain folk dances where it becomes listening and pleasure, and where it detaches itself from any form of imposition (or of power). Unison is a form which should be updated, with a balance between the criticism it causes and the exhilaration it can produce.

### ***I'm going to toss my arms***

The process of creation of ***I'm going to toss my arms*** started with “a very long improvisation directed by **Trisha Brown** whose theme was the exploration of what a moving sculpture can be”. In this film, the images of choreography alternate with those in which **Carolyn Lucas**, assistant to the choreographer, describes the process of composition. The elements from the first improvisation were then worked on and the dancers were aided by an outline by Trisha Brown in composing other material. Little by little, a choreographic phrase was worked out and transformed. The dancers also exchanged their gestural sequences. Once the piece was constructed, it became important to find “the idea, the words and the images” which had supported the work of creation, during the actual performance.

### **Joao Fiadeiro – De la composition en temps réel**

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<sup>8</sup> Thierry de Mey, composer, quoted by Geisha Fontaine in *Les Danses du temps*, Centre national de la danse, Pantin, 2004, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Mathilde Monnier, description of *Tempo 76* – [www.mathildemonnier.com](http://www.mathildemonnier.com)



The process of creation is generally divided between the moment of design, that of its realisation and then that of the performance. But some choreographers like to give flexibility to the show's apparatus. The choreographer **Robyn Orlin**, for example, uses live camera and thus integrates certain risks into the course of the performance. Other artists assert that all of the composition is done “in real time”, i.e. at the moment the dancers are in front of the audience. The work of the dancers before the show is then focused on their capacity to act on the spot, to perform with relevance and to construct the show as it unfolds in time. The Portuguese choreographer **Joao Fiadeiro** expresses his opinions in this interview on the methods and the finalities of composition in real time. He explains his process where the choice lies in the way in which one takes into account, or not, the unforeseen, the accidental. Far from being laissez-faire, real-time composition reflects the simultaneity of past, present and future, in our choices as in our actions.

### ***Laisser frémir***

Composition in a real-time includes an element of improvisation while also requiring the need to write over time. On the other hand, pure improvisation is concerned with other issues. It is not stripped of rules, but rules contribute more to a bouncing from one moment to another than to building continuity. The improvisations are usually carried out in communication with the musicians. In ***Laisser frémir***, the dancers and choreographers **Elsa Wolliaaston** and **Loïc Touzé** improvise with the double bass player **Joelle Léandre** and the accordionist **Pascal Contet**. Each of them plays, speaks and dances. Improvisation is exciting when it is a challenge: the challenge of taking a risk alongside one's function, one's competences, one's talent, to make them eventually reappear or explode.



## **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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