



Performing arts movement

Moving, being in motion is the heart, the essence of our condition as a living being. Even though our bodies may seem motionless, they actually never stop moving: our hearts beat, our organs are stimulated and our lungs keep to the beat. Whether we're standing up, lying down, or upside-down, our bodies embrace a myriad of potentialities for moving which, based on the challenge in hand – powerfulness, dexterity, balance, expressiveness... - are broken down into techniques, techniques whose mastery is grounded in art. Dance is one of these arts. As are high-wire acts and juggling. Beyond their differences in intention, in form or in implements, the common thread of these arts is to explore the physical and expressive resources of the body in motion. Sometimes, some of these art forms rub shoulders with others, and give birth to enrichment. The ever-so traditional trapeze act, for example, becomes an airborne choreography. And sometimes, a dance goes beyond the realms of a dancer's gestures: when it unites in harmony with the effects of lighting and images to transform the stage into an expanse in motion.

Circus, dance, video... the three registers that the artists of this Thema delight in weaving together and, at the same time, embellish. Nothing can stop art in motion!

1. When the stage becomes motion

Sanctum / Imago / Solo

Heh, what is it? A school of exotic fish? A mob of transgenic mammals? Or a sky sprinkled with psychedelic stars? Alwin Nikolais' great desire was to stimulate the spectator's imagination. The American choreographer created performances, such as *Sanctum*, where lighting, costumes, danced movement and even music participated together, harmoniously, in fashioning shapes that were in constant, abstract mutation, shapes whose signification depended on the eye of the watcher. The choreographic art is, thus, devised... an absolute art of motion. "I turn dance into an art that is just as much visual as it is kinetic", said the man who arranged every single component of the performance. Decked out with accessories that attenuate corporality, as in *Imago*, hidden under elastic fabrics, used as a moving screen for luminous projections, the performer dances in synchronicity with the undivided space of the stage, which he makes dance. Motion comes just as much from the movement and gestures of the dancers as from the play on light and the optical effects that are thus generated. A sense of magic and of enchanting mystery springs forth. A sense that led Alwin Nikolais to acquire the well-deserved nickname – "the magician".

The American master was also endowed with great talents of pedagogy. He was appointed as the director of the National Centre for Contemporary Dance, when it opened, in 1978. Among his students was Philippe Decouflé, who claimed his legacy.



Decouflé creates performances where imaging techniques participate fully in the choreography. In this extract of Solo, camera and dancer – Decouflé himself – join together to create an amazing pas de deux that swings between reality and virtuality, between the horizontal plane (the stage) and the vertical (the backdrop canvas – the Cyclorama). Created “live and direct” through the danced gestures, the image offers the body a poetic flight. It gives it wings, it multiplies it, disarticulates it and metamorphoses it into arabesques, kaleidoscopic magma. The movement, thus, unfurls in a multidimensional expanse that, in concert, reflects the worries of the choreographer-dancer, tormented by doubts and obsessions.

2. Infernal machinery

Sans objet / Öper Öpis

In Sans Objet, the protagonist initiates an incongruous duo with a robot! The imposing articulated arm, reigning in the centre of the stage, seems to have enticed the young man, to the point where he loses his mind and enters into a slowed down dance, a profusion of suspensions and disequilibrium. As a result of its robustness, its metallic brilliance, the machine seems to dominate its fragile partner. It guides him, like in an ever-so slow tango, initiating the movement that he is compelled to follow. But whenever it's vital, the robot also knows how to offer solid support and ensure he does not fall. A massive machine, yet nimble and delicate. He resists: he takes advantage of his head being sequestered to find other supports for his dance. Man invented machines. Yet, isn't the machine taking over control, asks Aurélien Bory in this play. Because if robotics are becoming increasingly accurate and seem to be closer than ever before to human movement, then isn't man in the process of losing his agility and humanity?

Mechanics, machinery, objects: the scenography of Öper öpis overflows with them. Here, the movement seems to be created by the mobile ground which causes sliding, rollovers, tumbles and complicates the tightrope walker's performances. The lack of stability, the perpetual oscillation of the stage makes the bodies grapple even more with the test of verticality. It renews the challenge to the laws of gravity that, in this case, dancers and circus performers, brought together by Zimmermann and De Perrot, take up. Everything is in motion, all the time, and risk-taking is permanent. This results in sequences that are full of humour: a tango with chairs, “hand-in-hand” acrobatics that become “hand-in-foot” ones. Because this wobbly, crooked scenography with its impossible horizontality also echoes the day-to-day life of human relations, and the perpetual readjustments that these relations imply.



3. There's choreography in the air!

Cavale / Kayassine / Vent d'Autant

Why not take the plunge together? A proposal that Yoann Bourgeois illustrates in his own way in *Cavale*. One after the other, the performers surrender themselves to the Earth's gravity. A sort of counter-thrust is linked to their thrust into empty space, a counter-thrust that brings them back, via the same route, to their point of departure as if the film of their flight rewound itself. Here, fall and rebound are on equal footing. Both procure the same dizziness, the same jubilation. The acrobats offer up their full weight to the Earth, which sends them ever higher, ever further into the sky, with their heads evermore in the clouds. They soar through the air like birds diving unto their prey before heading back to the flock. In this elusive state, between horizontality and verticality, a wish for weightlessness appears.

Fabrice Champion recalls his first sensations on a trampoline perfectly. He remembers discovering "this simple yet indescribable pleasure of "free flying"". But he went on to profess an absolute passion for the trapeze. To the point of becoming involved in an artistic project that was totally dedicated to this apparatus. In 1994, Les Arts Sauts was created, a performance that was to become the name of the troupe. For Stéphane Ricordel, the other founder, the aim was to "move the flying trapeze out of the sole framework of performance and of the acrobatic exercise and to empower it with aesthetic scope". This approach, which endowed aerial acrobatics with a specific scenography and dramaturgy, played a key role in the overall revival of the circus, which began at the end of the 1980s. The *New Circus* promotes the idea of a piece of work making sense, exposing a relevance, rather than a sequence of spectacular acts that were not linked in any way.

By designing innovative apparatus architecture, which was occasionally highly complex, the Arts Sauts had already created a new profile for aerobatics. In this sequence of *Kayassine*, the trapeze artists are spread out over the total length of the bridge at various degrees of height. As such, they can plunge together, or at slightly staggered intervals, meet and talk. The introduction of a third bearer for each acrobat extends the duration of the figures. The movement segues continually and creates a sort of aerial ballet, enlivened by musicians and singers, who are also positioned on platforms. This choreography into the void is not without risk. In 2004, Fabrice Champion became quadriplegic after seriously banging into a partner during a rehearsal¹.

Much less risky is this duo of acrobats from the Vent d'Autan troupe that inspires the tenderness of a lovers' stroll. Borne by this dreamy "hand-in-hand" that leads to the embrace, the female artist doesn't touch the ground, both literally and figuratively! Each

¹ Fabrice Champion passed away in 2011.



artist is in his or her own sphere... he is on the horizon, whilst she is perpendicular. And yet, the encounter takes place. He is from the ground below, she plays the airborne girl. Their contraries are joined together in an attractive formula, where acrobatics and dance meet. Moreover, they are not such strangers. As etymology reminds us, isn't the acrobat "the one that walks on the tips of his toes?"



To go further:

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BOISSEAU, Rosita, DECOUFLE, Philippe. *Philippe Decouflé*. Paris : Textuel, impr. 2003, cop. 2003. 168 p. (En compagnie).

CALAIS-GERMAIN, Blandine. *Anatomie pour le mouvement. Tome 1, Introduction à l'analyse des techniques corporelles* [2^e éd.]. Méolans Revel : Désiris, cop. 1991. 302 p.

LABAN, Rudolf, CHALLET-HAAS, Jacqueline (trad.). *La maîtrise du mouvement* [*The mastery of movement*]. Arles : Actes Sud, 1994 (2^{ème} éd.). 275 p. (L'art de la danse).

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MOREIGNE, Marc, DAVID, Claire (dir.). *Les Arts Sauts : entretiens avec Fabrice Champion, Laurence de Magalhaes, Stéphane Ricordel*. Arles : Actes Sud ; Châlons-en-Champagne : CNAC, 2010, 92 p. (Quel cirque ?).

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