



## When reality intrudes

All works of art have a complex relationship with the world and the time in which they are produced. From this point of view, contemporary dance conforms to the tradition of what is generally called “modern dance”. The works question, in a more or less explicit way, the context in which they are developed. The aesthetic choices of each choreographer also reveal how they conceive (or represent) the status of the artist in a given society.

How do the works bear witness to the world? Is the contemporary artist themselves the product of an era, a medium, a culture? What are the various methods of relating among the artist, the work, reality and the world?

As this Parcours shows, certain works are directly based on a set of political and social themes and many choreographers are sensitive to what surrounds them and take on the responsibility to bear witness to it. Sometimes, they revisit history.

Echoing the questions which concern civil society, the artists also explore how the body and movement can refer to ways of being and acting in a given situation. For several years, many creations have dealt with question of this kind, or encounter the question of religious symbols. There, the choreographers directly adopt a critical standpoint towards the context.

But, on the contrary, there are also processes in which choreographers work on the flow between artistic creation and reality. Here again, the approaches are multiple and are concerned with various issues. For some, it is a question of distorting reality by introducing artistic propositions, which modify existing perceptions. Other works in public spaces – such those of Christophe Haleb – place dance in the city, often in an impromptu manner and with the passers-by not always being aware of it.

### 1. Be inspired or bear witness to reality

#### *Dead dreams of monochrome men*

Homosexuality has long been dealt with indirectly in choreographic creation. But the appearance of the AIDS virus changed this. Several choreographers have died of AIDS, for example **Hideyuki Yano** in 1988, or **Dominique Bagouet** in 1992, while other choreographers take the disease into account in their artistic process. They do this especially because, for them, the body is the medium for the dance and the disease exacerbates the relationships between pleasure and suffering.



The American **Bill T. Jones**, whose partner **Arnie Zane** also died of AIDS in 1988, created *Still Here* in 1993, based on these questions: What is it like to live with a terminal illness? In *Good Boy* (1998), **Alain Buffard** works on “a body which exposes social and moral saturation, a body which speaks of vitality and disease”<sup>1</sup>.

For his part, in an approach perceived at the time of the creation as provocative, **Lloyd Nelson** uses certain homosexual practices for the material of the piece *Dead dreams of monochrome men*. In this creation, he was also inspired by the serial killer Dennis Nilsen who murdered gay men in London at the beginning of the 1980s. The choreographer places the dance in a hangar, which evokes “a sadomasochistic gay night club where four bodies explore the games of male desire, the theatre of sexual violence, voluntary submission and domination”<sup>2</sup>. He stages four dancers in a manner both sensual and abrupt, intensifying the gaze of the spectator and also questioning his possible position of “voyeur”<sup>3</sup>.

### ***Violences civiles about the piece Insurrection***

On 13 May 1988, while preparing her creation *Insurrection*, the choreographer **Odile Duboc** wrote: “Any instituted order carries within itself the seeds of revolt. There is a phenomenon which miraculously shakes up the monotony of our daily lives by injecting such strong feelings into it that they push us to want to find their origins however we can.”<sup>4</sup>

In this piece, *Insurrection*, created at the time of the bicentenary of the French revolution, Odile Duboc uses a framework of political questioning, but she works with it on the level of the form and not of the directly identifiable “intention”. “The choreographer then creates a piece whose political questioning must be understood in the body as well as in its composition. Nothing illustrative, even less anything narrative. It is a question of methodically exploring the forces which come into play in a mass movement, and the logic ready to allow it to be exceeded, beyond the disciplinary injunctions.”<sup>5</sup> She takes a historical referent and treats it in her own way.

Becoming attached to the relationship between the person and the group, as she went on to do in many other creations, Odile Duboc sets both the singular body and the collective body to movement. In the tradition of a “classical” questioning of the relationship between society and the individual, she seeks to discover how the dancing bodies can be organised and thus immerses herself in problems related to the functioning of society.

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Buffard, description of *Good Boy* – [www.alainbuffard.eu](http://www.alainbuffard.eu)

<sup>2</sup> Description of the film *Dead dreams of monochrome men* – [www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

<sup>3</sup> The title of company DV8 refers particularly to the English word *deviate* who means “perverse”; however voyeurism is potentially a perverse behaviour, according to certain moral standards.

<sup>4</sup> Odile Duboc, *Les mots de la matière*, Les solitaires intempestifs, Besançon, 2012, p. 73

<sup>5</sup> Archives of the CND in Angers – [www.cndc.fr](http://www.cndc.fr)



***Violences civiles*** is the film directed by **Jacques Renard** in 1990 about the piece ***Insurrection***.

### ***Final/ment/seule***

***Final/ment/seule*** is a series of actions, performances and shows entitled “Femmeuses”, in which the dancer and choreographer **Cécile Proust** seeks “to question the place of women in art and in our society, as well as the coding of bodies and genders”.

In this “femmeusesaction#19” presented in 2008 at the Centre national de la danse, she recycles testimonies, texts and images from archives collected during her research but also – in the form of videos – some of her own performances. The artist thus revisits theoretical writings and militant speeches from the feminist and “queer” movements, while injecting them with humour – from her own position as a woman and dancer – her own reflection on the complex concepts of sexual identity and gender.

With this both “danced” and “spoken” show, “between self-portrait and lampoon”, Cécile Proust proposes an “intimate manifesto [which] is also the spokesperson for other voices”. With this artistic proposal filled with landmarks and references, combining creation and theory, laughter and reflection, she helps the audience to tackle questions of the work in the current society, all the while leaving them free to formulate their answers.

### **Minute du spectateur – Mamela Nyamza**

The personal engagement of a choreographer depending on the society in which they live is sometimes the drive behind their artistic creation. As **Dominique Hervieu** emphasises in the edition of the “Minute du spectateur” dedicated to the choreographer and performer **Mamela Nyamza**, certain artists are “artist-militants who do not hesitate to use their art to denounce what revolts them”.

For Mamela Nyamza, it is crucial to point out all the forms of inequalities and violence in South African contemporary society. She questions the place of women in society and also the problems of racial segregation. The choreographer is black, was born in 1976, and marked by this first impossibility: of being equal to white people from the start. When a choreographer like **Robyn Orlin** tackles the problems of apartheid, she is indirectly affected – she is white and indignant at black people's fate. When Nyamza tackles the same problems, she is making reference to her own wounds. Her approach corresponds to another need and leads to an appreciably different artistic response. For her, it is a question of connecting an artistic positioning to an initial social position and of making the artist someone who disrupts the established order.



## ***Manta***

Contemporary choreographers sometimes tackle complex social subjects, like the wearing of the hijab. Created by the choreographers **Héla Fattoumi** and **Éric Lamoureux**, the show ***Manta*** “delivers a point of view on an extremely controversial question which affects all of contemporary French society – the wearing of the Muslim hijab”<sup>6</sup>. At a time when the question of legislating the wearing of the hijab has arisen, Héla Fattoumi, born in Tunis in 1965, wishes to embody what the hijab represents for a woman of today.

As the critic Gérard Mayen observes: “For Héla Fattoumi on a stage, and her spectators in the theatre, the piece ***Manta*** constitutes a very rare kind of experiment. Generally, it is considered that a costume is of secondary importance, there to add some symbols to the principal action, which is obviously that of the artists on the stage. In ***Manta***, a dancer (Héla Fattoumi) puts on the full-face veil, and this “costume” transforms her into a principal interlocutor of the action.”<sup>7</sup>

The posing, by artists, of such a question concerns the way in which they conceive their function in a given society, but also the way in which the spectator claims ownership of the artistic invitation made to him.

## ***Madame Plaza – Interview on Ha***

How to adopt the contemporary dimension in countries which don't give priority to it? In ***Madame Plaza*** (2009), the Moroccan choreographer **Bouchra Ouizguen** questions this concept of the contemporary by working with older women between forty-five and sixty who appear very far from the world of contemporary dance. Their voices accompany marriages in particular, they are the Aïta, cabaret singers.

The choreographer wants to make a distinction between contemporary dance and folklore, even if she associates the dance with her youth, in particular the Eastern dance which she practised for a long period, during her training with **Bernardo Montet**, **Mathilde Monnier** and **Boris Charmatz**. But she wants to find a form of dance which does not concern these categories, thinking that it is possible to find a personal form and a style that doesn't belong to the usual registers.

To create, she gathers and contrasts knowledge from various sources. She becomes attached to the “almost nothing” which is common to each one of her performers, and undoubtedly to that of each spectator. To invite women who are not artists to join a process of contemporary choreographic creation is equivalent to replacing a reality, not

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<sup>6</sup> Description of *Manta* – [www.odianormandie.com](http://www.odianormandie.com)

<sup>7</sup> Description of *Manta* by Gérard Mayen – [www.numeridanse.tv/fr](http://www.numeridanse.tv/fr)



characterised as art, within another reality, which is recognised as such. Indeed the choreographer continues to take part in many *in situ* performances in Marrakesh (cabarets, night clubs, building sites, lounges...).



## 2. Intervening in reality

### *Chantier autorisé au public*

There are the festivals, the co-productions, the artistic networks etc. But sometimes, there is nothing like that. The choreographers then invent other methods of production, action and creation. They invite themselves into the reality, but above all they intervene in reality.

“Building, destroying, Africa is a vast building site. Rebuilding, deconstructing, imagining common territories. Walking, jumping, making movements that connect us and not that separate us. Crouching, on your knees, standing, experimenting and reinventing public space... This film was based on the choreographic research task for the creation *Port du Casque Obligatoire* by **Boris Ganga Bouetoumoussa**.”<sup>8</sup>

Here, reality becomes the place where dance is not essential, but perseveres; where dance does not say anything, but takes over from everyday life; where it bridges boundaries, but creates true bonds; where it doesn't resemble anything, but liberates. “To be there without being there” the film asserts. Such could be the *volition* of dance, its intention as an action allowing change to happen. For the Congolese artist **Boris Ganga**, it matters that the dance on a building site gains a real audience. And conversely, it matters that the audience is accepted on the building site.

### *Dé-camper*

In *Dé-camper*, an *in situ* creation from 2006, the choreographer Christophe Haleb continues his questioning of the use of places and space and on the methods of consumption. He asked his dancers - with the agreement of the shop - to take over four windows of Printemps Haussmann in Paris, transforming them, in his words into “living windows” on the theme of “glamping”.

The artist thus modifies the relationship between fiction and reality, between seeing and being seen, the dancers exposed to the passers-by and tourists (some completely indifferent) “a life style in the open air”, a fake holiday. By doing this, through the usual modes of expression of his performers, between dance, music and theatrical play, Christophe Haleb question the devices of exposure of the bodies and advertising strategies, which - under cover to help us escape - sometimes domesticate our imaginations and our performances.

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<sup>8</sup> Description of *Chantier autorisé au public* – [www.africultures.com](http://www.africultures.com)



## **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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