

Bits & Pieces at Tanzfabrik Berlin

This text is a written reflection about and through a performance event. The particular event included nine short pieces by the students at the Tanzfabrik Dance Intense program, as well as one longer piece by an external choreographer. The quality of the text is akin to a rant, in that I recklessly perceive the event through my own current interests and express my thoughts haphazardly.

“(…) is part of an ongoing research.”

Research? A term and notion used wildly as “practice”. Now, I myself see a utopia where the specific implementations of research and practice are eloquently contextualized and elaborated, elucidated. I do recognize that that may be a lot to ask of a student, an amateur in their encounter with a creation process. Nonetheless, I feel it is fair to implore: Give me one more piece of context.

A research by... of... through... on... in...

One more piece of information which will position the research in relation to, however softly, anything else; thus, enriching and directing my attention. Or otherwise, if what you mean by “ongoing research” is “work-in-progress”, exclaim it boldly. Elaborating on potential differences in these two terms, I will leave for another time. Maybe just to say that colloquially I feel the latter is used in reference to a process directed towards a creation, whereas the former for a research process not contingent on a performance event.

Ease in ease out drama

Every single piece started and ended slowly, carefully, softly. Let’s problematize that: Is this particular choice really fitting, necessary for your specific piece, or is it a symptom of a perceived, situational common sense? How was this common sense generated – emerged beyond innocent know-how – and how or why did it sustain?

I don’t like it as a default. It can appear apologetic and timid as if waiting for the correct time; condescending and arrogant, as if waiting for all attending to fully appreciate the beginning or giving them ample time with the assumption they “won’t get it”; or just boring and excruciating.

Concept, Dance: (name redacted)

Stop this immediately. Yes, you made this piece, you had the ideas and headed off to the studio, where you did things then eventually stylized them for our spectatorship. All this falls under the jurisdiction of “creator” and its specific synonyms: director, choreographer, and so on. Another “default” which can be undone. I would rather just go with no sash, just name. I am willing to partially withdraw to the argument of the title providing context, in which case you may effectively choose just one. Any stewardship of the creation processes you shared with or delegated to someone else, there I perceive greater need for titles, as both context and fair crediting. (Spatz has a nice essay on this debacle.)

Fighting imaginary mathematical dragons

Let’s also question the functionality of a random floor work moment and an abrupt flurry or syncopated shifts of weight with illustrative arms (often with stiff writs) – sudden outburst of virtuosity beside the one displayed so far, foreign to it. Particularly for the more-or-less-skilled body, which has bravely managed to charge movement with presence – intention and meaning, more-or-less meaningful and intentional – it is even more pressing.

As one begins their adventure, the body intuits a certain quality of movement, a certain desire influenced by its capacities, identity, and so on. That in itself is already a great triumph, but it also has limits. It has yet to develop multitudes of plasticity. As one endeavors to do so, they often see something fanciful in another body, celebrate it and explore it. But heeds this: if one were to decide to place it in a performance piece, on this body in an exposed and anxious super-state, question where another body and one's own, with its peculiar moments of luminescence, meet and diverge.

The eternal question: Is he a good dancer or do I just think he's hot.

Instant Composition

What a wild and delightful concept, a playground pregnant with potentiality and freedom. Inasmuch as it is limited by the capacities and dispositions of the participants and the, however implicit, aesthetics and mythology of the space: the desirable, prioritized, Good as it is enacted by finds forms in decisions, behaviors, bodies, and so on. I am currently rather busy with the "magical" ability of untangling the web of a particular dance. Working with a group of improvisers through iteration seems to stabilize that web and as such allow greater flow and nuance – this can be key place to start unraveling. Provisionally naming slices, planes of consistency of an instant composition constellation. What if as an "Unraveller", I can watch a session and see traces of the matrix, qualities and approaches, aesthetics and fictions, gaining density. I see it now as an approach where one initially embodied the phenomenologist then becoming a mythologist.

String figures (SF).

Would be interesting to devise a practice of "white balance" for improvisational-practices, tuning the layers with volumes, densities, and intensities. Aligning to specific realms of embodiment and practice from a place of the rife, "total" openness of an open score. Rather than, as is often done, building that quality of attention and flow from the ground up, block by block, from laying down.

Un-namable

The final piece of the evening verbally directed our attention to the "elusive moments" where the bodies "emanate". In a way, it is a beautifully simple etude in its context, cherishing moments of dilation in the raw multiplicity of an (to whatever extent) open score. But also, in lieu of what I said so far, I desired greater specificity. The sparks of dilation can take many forms. As an individual fantasy finding embodied expression, a quality deeply permeating; as a synchronicity of bodies which proliferates human encounter and sparks ephemeral narratives; and many more. Which ones do we excavate and ponder?

I'm certain getting such a large group to improvise together in a semi-manageable way was lots of work to begin with. But, I would have appreciated specific forms, specific approaches being foreground, if only to provide a denser motor. In that sense, terming this multiplicity as "un-namable" (as was done in the show) can come off as an alibi. While many embodied phenomena may currently be un-namable – either yet to or not to be captured by language – I find them largely describable, however graspable, available to provisional stabilization. In the name of an increasingly specific grappling with reality, of collective research and rich discourse – to going deeper and wider.

Note: After the show, I got to speak with one of the students. Our conversation invited me to think about the processes and people behind the pieces I saw, and the gap between their desired and actual outcomes. And, on the "mythology" of the Tanzfabrik space and the Dance Intense program. How it developed through both shared experience and prior notions, and how it seemingly informed a synchronic homogeneity in style and approach between the pieces.