

Just for Today - A Territory of Negotiation, Emergence, Trust, Growth, and Dance

***Just for Today* is a seemingly slow-moving instant composition, in which Anja Bornšek, Maja Delak, Snježana Premuš, Kristýna Šajtošová, and Urška Vohar intentionally bring to view the less visible, less conspicuous materialities, embodiments, states.** When we refer to instant composition, we are referring to the art of inventing and organizing movement in the moment. In terms of this kind of composition, Maja Delak was crucially influenced by the work of Mark Tompkins, Julyen Hamilton, Lisa Nelson, and others. Similarly to these artists, she is drawn to those works that offer possibilities for deepening and problematizing the concept of composition, choreography, dance, movement. She is particularly interested in the construction of corporeality that does not imitate the choreographer's, but instead develops, arises out of a group – in this case – out of five performers and the sound, the space and the objects in it, the atmosphere ... *Just for Today* is seemingly slow-moving because its beginning is slow and, above all, because it requires a great amount of listening. But this does not mean it has a slow rhythm or that nothing is going on. On the contrary, also in the parts where movement is scarce, it tries to put an edge on something Lisa Nelson sees as hidden under the visible interaction between the dancers and the structure of the space, something connected to the interaction of the dancer with herself, this inner dialogue that is shaping the surface. The metaphor for this state was found in the notion of passivity in the sense of persisting, returning to a certain impulse, finding the quality in being slow and static.

One of the central principles, with which the performance also begins, is tuning. This means that the chosen performer allows the other four to take care of her. Lisa Nelson poses this question:

How is “tuning” an analogue for dancing and seeing dancing? First, it is physical – tuning is an action. It moves my body, my senses, and my attention. It's also sensual – I can feel it happening in my body. It's relational – it's the way I connect with things. And it's compositional – it puts things in order.

In *Just for Today* too, this tuning is very physical, corporeal, haptic. It is the source of the mode through which the performers interconnect – as well as connect with the objects in the space, with the sound, and thus construct the atmosphere. On the compositional level, this very tuning enables the translation of movement into creation of dance.

In the making of *Just for Today*, an inventory of tools was developed, intended for enabling the process of communicating about what we are doing, what we want, what we perceive in the process. The pool of these tools is quite extensive and there is no point in listing them all; however, we can point out some of the most representative ones. The first is the so called *image/frame* mode, where one of the performers is the *image*, while the others build a *frame* for her. We have been extensively exploring the relationality arising

among us, the moving sculptures of bodies, where contact is complete, where both the body and the gaze are directed to another body, a group. The work with the gaze has been of critical importance too – whether looking at each other or away or into the audience. One of the tactics is also consciously working with memory and the traces in space, with memory of something that has happened during the creation process or during the actual performing of the piece. We are exploring the possibilities of different beginnings, re-emergences of new and old deposits in the same performance. We have given a lot of attention to space construction – we call it inhabiting the space with objects, with a focus on how this alters the composition as a whole. We have been playing with how certain objects, even everyday objects, which tend to become abstract nonetheless, change the movement and the perception of bodies as subjects or objects and how they affect them. Objects can carry the image of other materialities too and they can also reveal the traces arising at a specific moment. Our task for each performance is to inhabit the space in this way at least once, and thus create movement. The strategies of ‘print’ and ‘imprint’ are also important, aimed at refining the migration of contents among the performers. Aided by these tools, a common pool of imagery is being developed, which becomes the source of movement either in the momentary situation or in a subsequent one. The use of scores suggests an entry into a specific task that is pre-prepared, although the way it is performed remains open. This presents another way of opening the field of negotiation among the performers.

The inventory and the strategies therefore enable an ongoing negotiation about what is arising in the performance. These are ever-evolving tools for the articulation of the process, which is opening up new compositions each and every time.

The open structure also brings improvised sound and space. The music consists of ambient sound, loops processed and performed live, and some referential sound contents, which, through decomposition and re-composition, sinking into the background and shooting into the foreground, build an unpredictable, yet – because of specific musical decisions – clearly defined dynamic. There are several sets of sound scenes, the sequence and macro-rhythm of which is negotiated before and during the performance. One of the sound layers is influenced also by wireless movement sensors, attached to the performers’ bodies; yet another layer is shaped by microphones, set up to capture the sounds in the space live. The entire atmosphere comes to life with the selection of objects available for use in the space, and with the always disappearing fog.

No two performances are the same. This is enabled by drawing lots for the first image, the first performer, with whom the performance starts. To keep out the associative stereotypes that burden our imagination we are often using chance. However, two other aspects are important as well. The first is retaining the liveness, spontaneity, and the presence, which we want to share with the audience. The other one is, more than anything else, a reflection of the present moment; that is, the reality of the 21st century, when so many things happen that are outside of our control and we simply have to accept them as they are. Or – make a decision and do something to change them. And this is also the self-evident principle of the instant composition: some things happen by coincidence, actions are intuitive or very much consciously decided upon, and all this makes up for a unique performance *Just for Today*.

The starting points leading to this performing mode were the themes of ageing and the grieving related to it. Ageing can be understood as a process,

as a changing modality. We were not discussing concrete stories, but focused more on the feelings and sensations occurring after the loss of certain aspects of different identities. In the event of loss, we have to cope with sadness and also grief. Besides purely personal issues that can make people sad, there is also a knowledge of the circumstances under which the dancers are working. Recalling Maja Delak's performance *Expensive Darlings*, which already thematized the position of contemporary dance in Slovenia over ten years ago, we can see that nothing has changed for the better; quite the opposite, the situation is now even worse. This is still painful, but this performance does not tackle these questions directly. *Just for Today* is bringing other issues into focus.

Ageing is related also to the themes of growing and maturing. Perhaps, with growing older, we can muster a certain distance from ourselves, thus making space for humour. Humour as a mature defence mechanism. And this is the quality we wanted to retain in the performance. The humour that strikes you after you have already come around to understanding your grief. And especially, if your life is going in the right direction, as the years go by, you gain experience, confidence, wisdom. A mature personality is much more self-confident, calmer when making decisions, and can also do difficult things. If an improvisation performance is your goal, you can do it only after you have had certain experience with it. There is a certain courage, but also vulnerability, in deciding on a composition in which there is no major event, no central point around which the entire performance turns, nothing and nobody to condense meanings around. To leave so much open space for the audience and not do it in a voyeuristic way wouldn't have been possible if the makers of this performance were just embarking on their professional paths.

Every choreography starts with selecting the performers. This was of crucial importance for this process. We actually started it with a series of workshops, in which we had the chance to get to know and, let's say, test each other. It is a fact that the creative team consists of makers with a highly sophisticated choreographic practice as well as extensive teaching experience, which is not insignificant. We have had a lot of clear, structured discussions, directed communication, with which we have described or evaluated our process, procedures, situations. At the same time, we are all very much aware that our working together is based on trust, listening, sharpening our perception, taking care of others and the performance, and sensibility, with which we are incessantly creating a common thing and are, together with the audience, working toward "our cause" - and by this, we mean the logic of standing up for a specific standpoint, position (political, aesthetic, scientific) in the aesthetic, discursive practice (Eda Čufer). As it has turned out, a much clearer motif than processuality, associated with ageing and grieving, is actually the enactment of pleasure and enjoyment in dance, movement, and the ways of co-existence of mature, but also vulnerable and sensitive people.

So, is *Just for Today* more intimist in nature, does it focus on the universalities of human relationships, or does it address also certain more engaged contents?

According to the attachment theory proposed by the developmental psychologist Gordon Neufeld, personal development depends on maturation, vulnerability, and attachment. The performance is playing with all these contents and from this perspective, it is undoubtedly universal, as it allows the audience enough space for entering and understanding the code that is being established as the performance progresses. On the other hand, considering the working conditions in Slovenia, the

plain fact that this production brings together five dancers who are at once established choreographers as well as strong personalities in the performing arts scene, is a form of the so called reparative tactics, to borrow the term laid out by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick after Melanie Klein. Reparative tactics are ways that help us develop the vision of alternative, socially progressive outcomes for Slovenian contemporary dance. To dance an open structure, in which the more the collective is visible the more each individual specificity stands out, is a risky thing. To develop an instant composition, in which the bodies never cease to maintain the presence of perception, observation, care, while actively making decisions in front of everyone's eyes, knowing that the dramaturgical climax will not turn up, is an act of the heart. And this makes *Just for Today* an engaged performance.

Written by Maja Šorli after conversations with the creative team.

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