

## **MASKA, 2005**

### **HI-RES: a state of exception within contemporary dance**

#### *A Context*

HI-RES by Maja Delak and Mala Kline is an exceptionally challenging dance performance that poses questions and give some unexpected answers to what is to be done in contemporary dance today, what are the limits of representation, as a frame/work/ that affects and infects contemporary dance, and what is the capacity of the dancing body in generating meaning for itself and the others.

HI-RES brings to the surface s well a collaborative processuality by two gifted dancers, choreographers and writers. Maja Delak writes and works on building an educational platform for contemporary dance to be fully integrated in Slovenia's school educational system. Mala Kline writes trying to express a philosophical background for contemporary dance with developing a vocabulary that will surpass the fixation of writings only and solely on dance, but will connect contemporary dance with a manifesto through which to think about conditions of a self.

The dance performance HI-RES was premiered in 2004 in Ljubljana and is divisible into four sections of theoretical, philosophical and linguistically defined readings, trying by no means to neutralize other effects to be found there.

#### *The Frame*

The context is not a frame. The frame has to be built. In HI-RES a frame is fixed powerfully visibly around the dancing stage. With the frame the stage is transformed in a painting. This frame is of crucial importance as it is underlying the artificiality of the contemporary dance "scene," its history and its practices. The frame is speaking about a contemporary dance being a practice that is "transcending" life, as it is a practice with a proper life and history. This frame is conceptualizing clearly that exists a gap, a distance between the body of life and the life of the dancing body on stage, and that it is not possible to reconnect these two distinctive bodies without channels, tubes and pipeline(s), as those for example used in the video, as part of this dance performance; tubes are as snakes in the dessert. This frame opens one of the most powerful points in contemporary dance today the question of proximity and distance of bodies between the dancers, between the dancers and the public, between contemporary dance and life. The frame finds its potential in grounding the performance within dominant representation models in dance, but also it allows for the disruption of the dominant representation, showing moments of failure within representation. HI-RES emphasizes precisely that just with a repetition of normative elements of contemporary dance we cannot advance further in dance research and elaborations.

HI-RES shows that it is a limit how the body encounters itself and the others in contemporary dance, what was as well precisely elaborated by Jerome Bel at the International congress on Contemporary dance and performance in Vienna, Tanz Quartier, 2005. The frame is the performative of contemporary dance to which points as well J. L. Austin' first performative rule: "There must exist an accepted

conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure that will include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances.”

### *The body*

The capacity of the body in HI-RES is captured by two positions, that I can best formulate, if I make a recourse to Deleuze.<sup>1</sup> First is the statement of Deleuze developed in relation to Spinoza: Nobody knows what a body is capable of.<sup>2</sup> Secondly it is to what Deleuze refers in the *Cinema movement* (1985, Paris) that a question is, if contemporary dance is capable to give a body.

In dance the body is the locus, the point of condensation, a thesis and anti-thesis at once, although it is clear that the presence of the body on stage is not enough to give body to a concept. HI-RES relates on one side to a history of dance and also to procedures that historically have normalized and disciplined the body. On the other we get the singularity of the dancing body, its uniqueness and its force while performing inventive choreographic elements. One such a figure stays powerfully long in our mind: the hybrid between an Egyptian sphinx and the beggar on the street. Next is the relation of this figure towards a box, I would like to identify it as Pandora's Box. In Greek mythology, we get such a description of Pandora and her box on the Internet; Pandora was the first woman on earth. Zeus ordered Hephaestus, the god of craftsmanship; to create her and he did, using water and earth. The gods endowed her with many talents; Aphrodite gave her beauty, Apollo music, Hermes persuasion, and so forth. Hence her name: Pandora, "all-gifted". When Prometheus stole fire from heaven, Zeus took vengeance by presenting Pandora to Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother. With her, Pandora had a jar, which she was not to open under any circumstance. Impelled by her natural curiosity, Pandora opened the jar, and all evil contained escaped and spread over the earth. She hastened to close the lid, but the whole contents of the jar had escaped, except for one thing, which lay at the bottom, and that, was Hope.

The box in HI-RES is about private property (Kline's shouts in the middle of the performance: it's mine) that puts on motion contemporary capitalist societies. This "it's mine" can be seen as well as a gesture of territorialization, of finding a proper space within contemporary dance. The box in the dance performance therefore provokes violence. The violence on the stage is the result of organizing the space of the stage in relation to private property and domination. Or, if I use another vocabulary of interpretation the Delak and Kline Pandora's box functions within the realm of a repetition compulsion, it keeps everyone on the wrong/right track.

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<sup>1</sup> I found these two references in the text by Christel Stalpaert, "Deleuze's aesthetics of intensities and the possibility of queer post-representations," in: *B-Book. A project by Frankfurter Küche and Vooruit*, Arts Centre Vooruit Ghent, Belgium 2004. I had a panel discussion recently in Leipzig (June 2005) with Katrin Deufert and Thomas Plischke, who are the *Frankfurter Küche*, and was given this extraordinary book as a present afterwards. *Frankfurter Küche* is a dance company that tries precisely to open the space of contemporary dance through philosophy and writings, and as well collaborative practices in different space. The *B-Book* was realised in collaboration with Jeroen Peeters and numerous writers and performers. I found extraordinary connections between the horizon of thinking by Delak and Kline and *Frankfurter Küche*. I will make reference in the course of this essay as well to Kathleen Vanlangendonck, "On feminists who do not call themselves feminists," another excellent text published in *B-Book*.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza –philosophie pratique*, Editions de Minuit, Paris 1981.

## *Boredom and dizziness*

HI-RES develops powerfully two states of action and contemplation: boredom and dizziness. They are constantly perpetuated throughout the whole performance. But contrary to what we can think this is not the old story about passivity interrupted by hectic dance movements. The simple mimetic structure of a body movement is in HI-RES passé.

In order to explain boredom and dizziness, I have to make a reference to Heidegger and Agamben. According to Heidegger, there are two structural moments that define the essence of boredom. The first is that we find ourselves left in a state of emptiness or absolute void; the second is the moment of being held in suspension. This later, which is also a sign of a deep boredom, is intrinsically linked to a state of dizziness. Therefore dizziness occurs in the dance performance HI-RES by Delak and Kline when the dancers similarly to animals are completely swallowed in their artificial dance environment, fixed by the frame. According to Matthew Wolf-Meyer what Agamben finds in boredom – following Heidegger – is the relationship between the boredom of man and the captivity of the animal. In both cases, man or animal is being-held-in-suspense – it is in this moment in the full presence of Dasein: Dasein is simply an animal that has learned to become bored; it has awakened *from* its own captivation *to* its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not open, is the human.<sup>3</sup>

Matthew Wolf-Meyer writes: “What Agamben attempts to do is to collapse the figures of the animal and man (and, despite the sexist overtones of ‘man,’ I’ll abide by his usage) into one another, implying that the state of animality is a performative, just as humanity is, and that there is strength to be drawn from the indeterminate passage between these states. His object of orientation throughout the essay is the ‘anthropological machine,’ that ‘optical machine constructed in a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape’ facilitating his recognition of himself ‘in a non-man in order to be human’ (Agamben, *Open*, pp. 26-27). The implications of the animal and man as performatives, while vaguely New Age-ish, is potentially profound, as Agamben finds in the articulation of the human (and its animality) a state of exception outside of the devastation of the ‘camp’ (as expounded in *Homo Sacer*). Moreover, in his move away from Auschwitz, Agamben finds a historical potential for the state of exception; rather than the singularity of the camp, the performance of the animal becomes a constant performance of the human, and creates a system of suspension, an explicitly poststructural theory of the production of humanity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Trans. Kevin Attell. Stanford: Stanford University, 2004, p. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Wolf-Meyer at <http://www.reconstruction.ws/BReviews/revTheOpen.htm>

In Delak and Kline dance it is not only animality and humanity that are performatives, showing that a process of becoming human, has to be learned (“human is simply an animal that has learned to become bored”); the whole idea of a contemporary dance is to be presented, developed and conceptualised as performative, that means as a relearning of contemporary dance, but that has to be pushed to its limits. HI-RES is a state of exception within contemporary dance.<sup>5</sup>

### *Semantic vs. semiotic*

In HI-RES we have a battle of two levels of producing, securing and relearning meaning on the stage.<sup>6</sup> One is semantically the other is semiotically codified. Julia Kristeva put both levels into “work” in her *Revolution of the poetic language* (1974).

I stated before that on one level HI-RES opens the question of rules, power, property and domination. To shout out: it is mine, is to emphasize the semantic component of the language grounded in the Oedipal phase. It is also about the inscription of the subject and the affect in discourse. The rules are the cause why some bodies matter and others not (By the way this is how Vanlangendonck efficiently captured in one sentence the meaning of Judith Butler’s “bodies that matter.”) This semantic phase can also be seen as to what psychoanalysis refers as the symbolical level, where we get the grammatical rules and content of words or meaning of objects (the box). On this level we get a picture of an identity, but, as stated by Vanlangendonck, we lose the fullness of the preOedipal desire.

On the other level, what we get on the stage is suggestive stains of colors that are as figures projected on the walls, sound and light as rime and rhythm. A different story! This is the semiotic that can be seen in parallel to what Lacan referred as the Imaginary. The semiotic refers to color, rhythm, rime, and intonation. It is the pre-Oedipal character of language, without semantic contents that allow the continuum of libidinal drives. The drives must be blocked in order for meaning to be realized; they will remain at play, but suppressed by the symbolic order. HI-RES shows the functioning of these two levels and of the semantic that maps the dynamics of the semiotic in its transitory paths through life, out there.

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<sup>5</sup> Recently I have a chance to see at Tanz Quartier in Vienna a dance performance by Anne Juren *Code series* (2005) when she similarly to Delak and Kline rewrites the question How to do things by words? (The quintessence of Austin’s performative) into “How to do dance with movements?” in which she even more rigorously includes the self-reflexivity of contemporary dance. At a certain moment of the dance performance, that appears as a series of rules and customs how to perform in dance, she starts to explain with words what we see and she was thought to do in order to produce a contemporary dance performance. What seems as a normative regularization of the dance machine is transformed therefore in a disturbing reflection of the normative of contemporary dance. Delak and Kline give a similar awakening slap: it is mine!

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kathleen Vanlangendonck, “On feminists who do not call themselves feminists,” in: *B-Book. A project by Frankfurter Küche and Vooruit*, Arts Centre Vooruit Ghent, Belgium 2004. Vanlangendonck text is taking a deep insight in these two levels, semantical/semiotic and how J. Kristeva developed them. I just reuse a few of Vanlangendonck thoughts for the purpose of conceptual reading of Delak and Kline dance performance.