

Daniel Linehan

Dance in relation

In the work of Daniel Linehan, dance and choreography are a starting point for meeting or researching other forms and disciplines. The results are hybrid: a book made according to the principles of choreography, a dance lead by experiments with text and voice. In order to question and expand his practice, he opens it up and integrates that which at first seems foreign to it. In this way, Linehan creates a specific and very individual movement language, that reads clearly as a unity in itself.

You were working as a dancer and choreographer in New York City before coming to Brussels. What was the reason for you to get a training at PARTS at that moment in your career?

'I had started dancing quite late in my life, around age 17. I had spent three years studying dance at the University of Seattle, after that I moved to New York City. Working there, I felt very scattered in my time and attention. I was taking classes at Movement Research, I was working with two or three other choreographers, I started making my own pieces and I had to wait tables at a restaurant in order to make a living. The amount of time I could really work in the studio was limited, therefore I couldn't go as far with the material as I wanted. I needed to go somewhere where I could spend each day in the studio and be more focussed.'

When you entered PARTS, was it what you imagined or desired it to be?

'Before coming to PARTS I had the idea that the training would be very flexible and that I would have time to work on my own projects. I think at first, when I started there, I got the feeling it wasn't like that at all! But after a while I found out that I could take the flexibility I needed. There was technique class every morning, and in the afternoon we had workshops with choreographers such as Xavier Le Roy and Jérôme Bel or workshops focussing on the Rosas repertoire. I wasn't so interested in repertoire so I took that time to work on my own projects and to work with other classmates to create new pieces together.'

You graduated in 2010 and became 'associate artist' in deSingel in 2012. How did that happen and what influence did it have on your career?

'I didn't see it coming! I had already presented some pieces in deSingel during Bouge B, a festival for younger artists and smaller scale work. Karlien Meganck, programmer of deSingel, proposed the residency to me in the form of a *carte blanche*: they were interested in presenting a new piece of mine and at the same time, they were open to my experimentation. I wanted to try out new formats and I made some proposals. We decided to work on a book, *A No Can Make Space* (2013). Another idea was the workshop *Vita Activa* (2013), a project that takes place in the theatre space but which is about a completely different working process. I invited 40 unemployed people from outside the dance field to participate. I was interested in expanding my experiences and creation process, and to have artistic experiences other than working with professional dancers on making a piece. I really took the opportunity of being 'associate artist' to create experiments for myself, and that was possible in deSingel.'

At the moment you work mainly as a choreographer. Did your training at PARTS guide you to that decision, or was that something that was clear for you already beforehand?

'I think I went into PARTS knowing that I wanted to make my own work. I was also open to dancing in the projects of others, I danced with Noé Soulier for example. After I finished PARTS I continued creating my own pieces and I was still touring pieces that I had made at the school. In the end there was just no time left to dance in other people's work.'

'I'm sometimes curious to take part in other people's processes. In the past it gave me inspiration and new ideas, but I'm not that much in need of that now. I get inspired by what I see, be it on the stage, in galleries, films, etc.'

What are some of your specific inspirations?

'For different pieces I make, I have different reference points. For the moment, I'm inspired by Dadaist artists, such as Kurt Schwitters, and some sound poets that relate to the piece I'm working on now, *dbddbb* (2015). For *Gaze is a Gap is a Ghost* (2012) I watched a lot of Hitchcock movies, because of the first person camera technique he uses which I was especially interested in. That piece had something of a light narrative in it also, and suspense. In *Zombie Aporia* (2011) there's a clear reference to the Sex Pistols.'

You talk about references from the visual arts, poetry, film — inspirations from outside dance. I read that you talk about your work being about 'dance and not dance', and that you look for the impossible: 'trying to do something that seems not possible in the system that you are inside of'. Is that why you look for something outside dance, to start with an impossibility in order to overcome it, to create friction? 'I'm always interested in putting dance in relation to other forms that come from outside dance. It produces interesting tensions, new forms or hybrids. I find this a very dynamic way of working. There are certain formats that I keep coming back to: dance and photography, dance and video, dance and the voice or text. I think I'm interested in how these outside influences can contaminate dance, and how through the process of contamination, I come to results that I don't at first expect.'

In order to open up the practice? Is dance in a way restricting?

'I don't have anything against dance as a practice, I'm just curious about what dance can do. I don't want to limit dance in the sense that it can only speak to dance — it has to speak to text or image as well. In a recent piece that I made, *Un Sacre du Printemps* (2015), to the score of the music of *Le Sacre du Printemps* of Stravinsky, I investigated how dance relates to the form of the music more than the narrative of the story of the music. I started by listening to the music as such, not to interpret it as the supposed story of the ritual sacrifice. I wondered how the dance could respond to the rhythm, the sound and the structure of the music as I heard it.'

Did the *Vita Activa* project start from a similar intention or curiosity? In this project, what is 'outside dance' is literally the group of people you work with, the 40 non-dancers with whom you start a conversation about work and time.

'I was definitely curious to open up the definition of dance and choreography. A first idea of working with a large group of amateurs was to set a dance on them. But then I wondered how that would be relevant for them or for me. It became clear that I had to take this chance to experiment with my definition of choreography and dance. I

organised the workshop around different exchanges and encounters that would happen between the participants. When we have time together for a whole week, what are we going to do with that time? What does it mean that they are not 'at work' but that they are working and sharing time? We created a time-bank during that week where each person would give an hour of time and receive an hour of time from someone else. It could be about different services or different lessons, inside or outside the studio. There were a few concrete proposals but it mainly stayed open as an hour-long exchange with each other.'

What kind of presentation did the project result in?

'I wanted the experience from the group to have an impact outside the group. The presentation in the end became something like a documentary. Each person was given a minute or so to present an action or a speech in front of the audience that pointed to what was most significant about the week, to offer the participants a chance to zoom in on a particular moment and share that with the audience.'

Not so much not-dance coming into dance then, but more the other way around: dance, or principles and methods of a choreographic creation process, opened up or made available to people outside of the field. Do you think it is important for artists to open up their practice in this way?

'That's a difficult question, it has to come from the interest of the artist I think. I didn't know that I would be interested in that kind of exchange. I had seen some projects at Documenta dealing with these questions, and that's how I started thinking about *Vita Activa*. It became important and valuable for my own practice, as an experiment. I do think it's important for institutions to find projects that are not just happening on the stage. For me, being used to working in the studio, which means being closed off for a couple of months with my collaborators, this experience was a real change. And it allowed me to come into contact with people I don't encounter on a day-to-day basis.'

You often work with language and speech, is that an element that you consider comes from outside dance, or is the voice a logical continuation of the body?

'I'm interested in how language can point to things and signify so specifically. Dance has a different function: it can't communicate in the sense language can, it expresses things in a different way. These two forms, language and dance, have different abilities and when I put them together I'm provided with more options and possibilities.'

'It's not that I use language in every performance. According to the questions I want to address, I use language or not. Maybe my background partly comes into play: as a teenager I was involved in theatre and acting. Not professionally, but I have some experiences in it.'

'In the old modernist idea of dance it's about the body in space and time, but now that definition is larger. The body is not just lines and points in space: it's about physical presence. The voice emanates from the body. In a few performances I'm exploring the impact of the body on the voice. In my solo, *Not About Everything* (2007), for example, I'm doing the same action over and over again reaching a point of exhaustion that you can hear in the voice. In *Zombie Aporia*, the dancers shake each other's chest, influencing the sound of the voice. In that sense, I see the voice as a vibration. The vibration is in the air, and reaches the ears of the spectators.'

'Apart from the voice as a physical presence, using language also provokes thoughts. I like the presence of both levels, the voice as physical vibrations in the air and the text that generates ideas and meanings. In the piece I'm working on now, I'm stripping away meaning and text while still working with the voice. We're working with Dadaist sound poetry, so I'm especially focussed now on the physical aspect of the voice: on the physical nature of a consonant versus a vowel, on how the rhythm of the text impacts the dance, stripping away textual significance.'

You made a book during your residency in deSingel, as you explained before, what was the reason you decided to use a written form as part of your research?

'In dance, once you've performed the experience is over, and in order to make it happen again you have to re-apply yourself. There's a part of me that finds this is a bit frustrating, especially when I'm dancing in my own pieces. I want to move on to a new creation, but in taking back an old piece I have to re-bring my body and full presence into that old piece. I wanted to create an object where the work would leave a trace, without me having to reproduce it.'

'In different work processes I've used writing as a means of personal reflection and research. Making the book wasn't a matter of writing new things, but of creating something out of material I already had. I wanted to search for a way to put this material in a form that could be shared with an audience. I conceived the book not as an explanation about my working process but as part of the matter of the process itself. I wanted to treat the book as if it was a choreography, using some of the same methods that I use when creating a dance piece: creating small materials, putting them next to or on top of each other, making juxtapositions and simultaneous layers.'

That meant an intense revisiting of your own writing. Was writing and/or reflection always important in your practice and how was that implemented or stimulated in PARTS?

'I write during various points in the work process: journal entries, emails, conversations with other people, self-interviews, in which I reflect on ideas about the work. Writing is a way of processing my thoughts. It allows me to come up with new ideas to work on in the studio or to find answers to problems I'm having in the studio. Writing was not a requirement in PARTS, but you have to write proposals for studio work and self-evaluations. What was mainly interesting for me during my training was to see how writing functioned in the working process of some of the artists that gave workshops. Chrysa Parkinson introduced me to the idea of the self-interview. Apart from that there was always a strong emphasis on reflection: on your own process, on other people's work, in order to create a dialogue and discourse.'

Did the immersion and dialogue at PARTS create a strong sense of community? After graduation, was it difficult to step out of that community, or do you carry that with you in your career?

'I only did the last two years of the research cycle, and I loved the creative concentration and sense of being removed from the distractions of daily life, at least for a while. I needed that specific focus, and PARTS definitely creates a focussed environment in which conversations are continuing and can become deeper.'

'I recently went to the opening of the new academic year, which was also a celebration of 20 years of PARTS. There were speeches from people from different generations and from theory and dance teachers. It was interesting to discover how

these different speeches would be about the same topics — in a way the speeches were talking to each other. There is a common conversation happening. That doesn't mean that everyone is saying the same thing but that they are speaking to each other.'

Esther Severi

Daniel Linehan first studied dance in Seattle and then moved to New York in 2004. His work first came to public attention in 2004 with the solo *Digested Noise*, presented in *Fresh Tracks* at Dance Theater Workshop. In 2005 and 2006, he worked with a team of four other dancers to create *The Sun Came and Human Content Pile*. Linehan was a 2007-2008 Movement Research Artist-in-Residence. In 2007, Linehan premiered the solo *Not About Everything*, which has since been presented in over 75 venues internationally. In 2008, Linehan moved to Brussels where he completed the *Research Cycle* at PARTS (2008-2010). In 2013 Linehan formed his own company, *Hiatus*, that receives structural funding from the Flemish Government since 2015.

Daniel Linehan was associate artist at *deSingel* (Antwerp) and *New Wave Associate* at *Sadler's Wells* (London), both from 2012 to 2014. Since 2013 he is artist in residence at *Opéra de Lille*.

Selected works:

*dbddbb* (2015)

*Un Sacre du Printemps* (2015)

*The Karaoke Dialogues* (2014)

*Vita Activa* (2013)

*Gaze is a Gap is a Ghost* (2012)

*Zombie Aporia* (2011)

*Montage for Three* (2009)