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L'ACTUALITÉ DES ARTS VIVANTS

DANIEL LINEHAN, FLOOD

American dancer and choreographer established in Europe for several years now, Daniel Linehan signs hybrid pieces where choreographic writing, text, music, video are superimposed. Since his first solo *Not About Everything* in 2007, his creations are scheduled throughout Europe and the United States. His last play, *Flood*, is presented for the first time in France this summer at the Montpellier Danse Festival. On this occasion, Daniel Linehan agreed to come back to the issues of this new creation and answered our questions.

Flood is your 14th piece. Looking at your career, are there any analogies between the pieces composing your repertory?

In my pieces, I always set up certain rules at the beginning of the creation, as if I'm establishing the parameters for a game, and then in choreography I play with the rules and see how far I can bend the rules until they break. Sometimes this creates a

situation where the dancers are testing the limits of their endurance. In *Not About Everything*, the test was: how long can I keep turning around in circles until I have to stop? In *dbddbb*, the test was: how long can the dancers keep walking and talking while keeping a common rhythm? In the first half of *Flood*, the test is, how much can the dancers accelerate their dancing? Can they achieve the same physical actions in a shorter and shorter amount of time?

How does *Flood* could take part into the artistic research ?

I am trying to understand more and more the connection between sound and body. I have long been interested in the dancers using their voices, and especially exploring connections between text and dance. Lately, I have been moving away from text and trying to find different connections between the body and the voice, and between the body and the breath of the dancer. What kind of sounds can the dancers make which are not only talking and singing, what are the other sounds that can be created? More and more I am also interested in external sounds as well. In this piece, I am collaborating with sound designer Peter Lenaerts who creates a landscape of sound that at one moment gets so intense that you can feel it shake your own body in your seat. In *Flood*, we tried to see if our voices could create sounds that would resemble different elements, like fire, air, metal, wood, etc. We also tried to imagine what our voices would sound like if we were humans from 10,000 years ago, or 10,000 years in the future.

Can you look back at the genesis of *Flood*?

To start with, I was reflecting on the idea of obsolescence. Every year that passes, there are more and more new things entering our lives: new products, new technologies, new ideas, new modes of social interaction, etc. There is so much focus on the new and the trendy, but less focus on the obsolete, on what is disappearing. I wanted to bring more focus to this aspect of disappearance, and the feeling I have today of accelerating disappearances.

How did this reflexion take place on stage?

I wanted to translate these ideas of appearance, disappearance, and acceleration into choreographic principles. Through a series of cycles that get shorter and shorter in duration, the dance at first accelerates and then gradually fades away. As the dancers have less and less time in each cycle, their interactions and movements begin to disappear, until the only thing that remains is the ghostly memory of the movements that they had embodied and the relationships they had created.

With this new creation, you continue to create a dialogue between the choreographic score and the voice score. How do these two mediums interact in *Flood*?

Unlike previous pieces in which I worked with language or invented languages, in *Flood* the voices of the dancers are stripped of any linguistic content, and we explore more primal utterances: shouts, grunts, gasps, and breath. At times, when the rhythms of these sounds follows the rhythms of the movements, it creates an effect that is almost robotic or futuristic. At other times in the performance, the sounds of the dancers are more animalistic, or else their voices seem more social and communicative. I've always thought of the voice as a very physical aspect of the body, and in *Flood*, I wanted to explore all the ways in which changes in the voice affect how we perceive a human being. A person might seem more like a mechanism, or more like an animal, or more like a conscious being depending on how they use their voices. I wanted to explore this wide range of the human experience, because we are all mechanisms as well as animals as well as conscious beings.

How did the rehearsal work take place with the dancers? Did you already have materials to offer or did you work in an empirical way?

In rehearsal with the dancers, I brought some materials that I taught them in the beginning, but most of these materials were thrown away during the creation. In general, I find it more interesting to see material that dancers develop with their own bodies, and when I see a dancer performing something that I teach to them, it often looks foreign on their body, like they cannot fully embrace the material. So I gave the dancers several physical principles to work with, and then in the first few weeks of the creation, we improvised and we built the physical vocabulary together in the studio. In the end, they are dancing themselves; they are not dancing a version of me.

What were the different principles you worked on?

One of the dominant physical principles we worked with was the idea of a vector, a direct movement without resistance. I feel as though we live today in a time of vectors. We have flights that can travel directly from Paris to Seattle without any obstacles or difficult terrain to navigate. We have instantaneous connections with each other across all kinds of different online networks. People want to believe in vectors—continual progress, steady economic growth—but is that sustainable? I was curious to develop a physical vocabulary that would reflect the exhilaration as well as the dangers of this age of vectors. In addition, we also worked with other physical principles, such as orbital/circular movements, and erratic/unpredictable movements, in order to create a counter-balance to the vectorized movements.

The costumes worn by the dancers are very graphic, how do they participate in the dramaturgy of *Flood*?

During this piece, I was thinking about how the new is constantly replacing the old, but also about how the old re-emerges and is rediscovered. As with the voices of the dancers, which sometimes evoke futuristic digital noises and at other times evoke

more ancient and primal sounds, I wanted the costumes to evoke both the past and the future. The costumes have brightly colored wires, which could imply that the dancers are cyborgs from the future, but there is also old folkloristic fabric stitched into the costumes, creating a collage of the old and the new.

You carry on collaborating with the 88888 collectif, which signs the scenography of *Flood*. Can you tell us more about the installation that is on stage?

In reflecting on the idea of disappearance and translating it into a choreography, I wanted it to be a gradual process rather than a sudden cut. I wanted the dancers to slowly become less visible on the stage, rather than just leaving the stage, or disappearing behind a black curtain. The 88888 team designed layers of semi-transparent curtains, so that when the dancers enter the space of the scenography, there are different degrees of transparency. In the first part of the performance, most of the dance takes place in front of the installation, but then the dancers start to go deeper and deeper into the different layers of curtains until they gradually disappear. The whole structure also has empty spaces and cuts that follow a diagonal, as if a river or a flood has passed through and carved out caves and passages in the structure.

How this installation find echo in your choreographer's writing?

I conceive this space in the curtains as a space of memory and forgetting, with increasing layers of obscurity. As the cycles of the choreography repeat and transform, the scenography becomes a space where the dancers continue to embody shadows, echoes, and traces of the dance before it disappears completely.

This interview is also available in french

Flood, concept, choreography Daniel Linehan. Dance, creation Erik Eriksson, Michael Helland, Anneleen Keppens, Víctor Pérez Armero. Dramaturgy Vincent Rafis. Scenography 88888. Sound design Peter Lenaerts. Lighting design Elke Verachtert. Costumes Frédérick Denis.