

# Ineffable materialities

Or how Jérôme Bel can't say goodbye

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# Every body has its story

Years ago, I abolished my theatre training. Being trained at the HKU in the creating side of theatre, as well as the performing one, I graduated as a 'theatre maker'. We're talking 1998. One of the founders of this field of study and the head of department in those days was Wim Meuwissen. He is the man behind the idea that I was to become a 'maker' instead of an actor, while becoming an actor was why I initially chose to study at the HKU. 'Performer' is a better description of what I had in mind. But Wim knew better.

Currently I have created visual artworks that relate to theatre. I encountered my acting side again, but this time it was me who made the choice to not want to act. I discovered that my own presence was insurmountably theatrical, while what I am interested in is a purer performative attitude. Closer to normalcy. In asking 'regular people' to perform in my work, it gets closer to the neutrality I am looking for. To tell him I finally understand, I decided to write Wim a letter.<sup>1</sup>

Haarlem, October 2021

Dear Wim,

In exploring neutrality in performance, I got back in touch with rudiments that are part of my constitution. In the summer of 1998, I said goodbye to the theatre department of the HKU with a diploma in my hand and a child in my womb. I did not envision what was the fruit of all those days of training.

Having done only a small amount of acting in the next few years, a decade later I wanted theatrical performance to no longer be part of me. Or my life. To be in the here and now, having an existence that coincided with reality, felt more honest and thorough.

As you know, the earliest objections to theatrical performance go back to Plato. His philosophical objection was that theatrical performance was inherently distanced from reality and therefore unworthy. I know now that my resistance originated from personal frustration. Meanwhile I have come to disagree on unworthiness of theatrical performance. If you acknowledge the frame in which it happens, theatre creates a way of looking at things. It mediates between an idea and interpretation. It can, from an artists' perspective even become an interesting tool: if you understand the rules, you can play with them. I like to quote theatre maker Dries Verhoeven, here: "theatre and the outside world getting in each other's way is precisely what I enjoy; the fact that a performance is not a copy of the world, but a window through which you can literally look at reality, in all its unpredictability."<sup>2</sup>

I am not sure whether the work I currently create should be called theatre, but it has a theatrical quality. I abolished my theatre training, Wim. However, it does not want to abolish me. Four years of intense training inhabit the corporeality of my body: the neutral

mask classes, the voice classes, the aikido. Do you know that I am always aware when my body weight is on one leg instead of two? Every time I do some kind of performative action, be it in movement or reading a text out loud, I am perceived as rather theatrical. I am stuck in this distorted hyperreality of acting: performing and being aware of this performance in the same moment. Unconsciously adding within this moment the technical tricks I learned, creates a theatrical, sometimes even dramatical performance.

Contrastingly, I favor the unpolished performance of people that do not have any training or experience in performing. This way of performing is not on the opposite side of theatre necessarily, but away from theatricality, from producing a certain outcome or shaping it. In my study in visual arts these days, I am working with untrained people as a medium. I ask them to stay close to neutrality in their performance to represent reality. I don't use spoken text. The body is more direct than spoken words. It can express things that cannot be caught in language. By movement someone makes oneself known. The moving body expresses an immediate impression; all meaning appears at once. In the use of text, it is unfeasible to stay close to the ordinariness I am aiming at. When I talk about performance, I am primarily talking about performance in movement. Movement as the absence of words, as the art of silence.

There is a Dutch word that captures the possibility of this kind of movement: *handeling*. This translates as 'act' or 'action' which, as in Dutch, again often has a theatrical connotation. In this context by 'action' I mean a movement performed without the intention to produce meaning. A movement that is no more than that movement itself, existing objectively in the world regardless of subjectivity. Untrained people can perform actions more easily than I can. This 'realness' is important to me because it translates nothing. **It is.**

I remember that we would do *études* to exercise acting that starts from movement. You would show us the *étude*: you entered the scene, just went to sit in a chair, raised your arm and let it back down. We were supposed to understand what was happening. How did your body and movement have an impact on and interaction with the space around you? What did your body tell? I don't think I understood on a conscious level what we were doing. But my body did.

I abolished my theatre training. But who am I kidding? I have a strong affinity with dance. The love for this kind of movement is congenital. I was the kind of child that danced instead of walked. I'm curious for the materiality that every body contains: the rhythm, the images it creates and the stories, even meaning perhaps. What does it signify and what does it show us about the individual that spoken language cannot touch upon? Every body has the ability to create through a visual language. In all its simplicity. I see dance in nearly every movement.

Another motive for movement as an artistic medium is what Hélio Oiticica calls *disintellectualization*: "Dance is par excellence the search for a direct expressive act: it is the immanence of the act. ...In reality, dance, rhythm, is the actual aesthetic act in its essential raw state-implied here is the direction towards the discovery of immanence. Such an act, the immersion into rhythm, is a pure creative act, it is an art. It is the creation of the actual art, of continuity, and, like all acts of creative expression, it is a producer of images." <sup>3</sup>



I abolished my theatre training, but I am sure that it has always had its influence on how I look at the world. I like to watch people. I like to study them: people on the streets, how they move, people as they are. I share this desire for watching with most people. The popularity of reality television in all its contemporary manifestations are proof of this desire. This is not reality though; it's a hyperreality. Within a frame and with solid instructions the performers recreate reality.

In my performative works, videos of situations with moving people, I am trying to represent a reality: how I look at the world. I asked my friends and family to perform in them. With a minimum on instructions, free of pretense or turning them into characters, they performed as themselves. These works were created mostly intuitively, constructing an aesthetic of poetic compositions with room for interpretation. Offering a possibility for the viewer to make their own stories, not producing preconceived meaning. In this way of working there is the possibility of failure. It might not work out like I anticipated. And having the performers doing it their own way, allowing their materiality to be unpolished, land letting go of control, creates a risk. If it deviates, it can become more exiting. But if it's just a dead composition, we fail. But can we fail at all? To what standards? Who is to judge?

I must admit that I only recently read the book that was written as a homage to you on your parting from the HKU in 2005. In it I read that a play only works when it not just survives the dead composition but acts as a living thing. If all goes well, the composition is defeated by its execution. "This is only possible when the performers are prepared to experience something subconscious-conscious."<sup>4</sup>, Lex Berger writes. Upon reading this specific paragraph, I wrote down: THIS IS THE CRUX! WHY I CAN'T BE AUTHENTIC!!!

I will never forget one of the last days at the academy, Wim. You came up to me after my graduation performance and handed me flowers. You said one simple sentence of three words. And walked away. Again, I could not comprehend.

Anyway, I said I abolished my theatre training. But perhaps I did not. As it is fused with me, I might as well use it. In my work with people.

You once said that play, as in acting, is distilled fear that conquered.

Yes Wim, some seeds grow slow.

Gratefully,  
Marie



# The art of watching

People like to watch people. They always have. It has been a form of human entertainment from the ancient modes of theatre to situations in which the subjects were on exposure involuntarily. In medieval tableaux vivants, people were posing stationary and silent to present living paintings, their contemporary equivalent being our street performers posing in costumes at the Dam square as living statues. All desiring to be watched. At the royal courts, circuses, and fairs of the 16th century, people with extraordinary appearances were put on display. The Inuit were the first 'exotic' people to travel through Europe to be exposed, followed by native Americans and African bushmen. In the summer of 1897, King Leopold II had 'imported', as if they were objects, 267 Congolese to be shown around his colonial palace in Tervuren. At the 1958 World Fair in Brussels some six hundred Congolese men, women and children were put live on show. Visitors could look at them in their 'traditional' dress, in a recreation of their natural habitat, behind a bamboo fence. The Congolese were supposed to do their regular routines as some anthropological act. They acted in-between a presentation and representation of themselves. 'Human zoos', these installations of the colonial past were called. The ethics of representation were not discussed. Worse atrocities put upon humans continued and continue, but the simple act of watching seems harmless. The abuse is in the consentless objectification and judging of their bodies and the denial of the human being human. Fortunately, this was the last time such a 'zoo' was staged. Anywhere.

That is it that makes us want to look longer than necessary at the other? To stand across from another human being and stare at them? To shamelessly study them and often objectify them? It can be to try and understand people better or to become more empathetic, but mainly it's our curiosity about otherness. The uniqueness of the others' body interests us because we have a body as well. We belong to the same species.



identify and feel alienated. Sometimes even superior. Looking at others makes us look at ourselves. Or is a distraction from looking at ourselves.

“The greatest strangeness one finds in one’s own body. So not in the search outside, but in introspection.”<sup>5</sup>

We might not always be as aware, but engaging in cinema, television, and social platforms like Instagram and Tiktok, are familiar proof of our urge to watch. This is not live though. There is a mediated space in between that detaches us from reality. Distance is a key factor in the act of watching. The more distance, the safer we are. The lazier as well.

But when do we come aware of ourselves as observers? When the other stares back? When they make contact?

Most of the time, we will be involved in the act of watching unconsciously. In the mediated way of watching, we adopt a consuming attitude. Only incidentally we are aware of ourselves watching. Suddenly we realize we lost hours, while watching television. In a more active way of watching, in real time at real people, we can be (asked to be) more conscious.

If the object of our observation makes eye contact, we become very aware of the fact that we are watching. And perhaps we are being watched in return. Not only distance between the spectator and the observed is an important factor in defining the act of watching. Furthermore, the framework in which it happens, and the agreements made upon the act, are crucial elements to determine the interpretation of the particular act. Say, we pay for a ticket, we keep distance, we respond in a pre-arranged way: we keep our mouths shut or we get involved. Or not.

Crucial factors for determining the framework are whether the observed know they are being watched and agree upon that and whether they intend to get something

across. For some it may even be enjoying being watched. Who benefits from this act of exchange? When does watching produce meaning?

I am interested in the economics of watching and when it produces meaning, especially in the context of a visual artwork that uses the physical materiality of movement of the human body. Often this appears as choreography, and it is mostly ephemeral.

Is live performance in which performer and spectator are physically in the same space disappearing? During the COVID epidemic with its lockdowns, we have experienced creative alternatives in digital and virtual forms. It has proven to us that people long for the real thing, to have an exchange in a live event. The audience is a living creature that breathes. We are looking for the sustainability of presence. In the here and now. The moment when there is an actual connection between the audience and the performer, in which we both share the same thing, is when it happens. Then we breathe together.

My focus on movement produced by unskilled bodies, derives from what I lost: the interesting quality that is found in newborns, people suffering from dementia and animals. There is no word describing it: the purity and neutrality in performing movement in front of an audience without making more of it than it is. In this thesis I will be looking at human performers and their ability to reach this quality within a theatrical setting without being theatrical. Let us start with looking at some frameworks.



# Desire of peeking

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, tableaux vivants sometimes featured poses plastiques ('flexible poses') on stage by virtually nude models. In sex theatres or peepshows, that due to the internet hardly exist anymore, the framework is clear. We watch from a short distance, shielded from the glance of the performer, hence the 'peeping.' We pay for the time we can watch, usually minutes. It creates a space for the performer to move in a contactless zone. (S)he produces a representation of sexual physicality. Us, on the other side, in anonymity, objectify the exposed body for our sexual pleasure. In *The Piano Teacher*,<sup>6</sup> the famous novel by Elfriede Jelinek, Erika, the main character, has a dark desire for going to peepshows. In the following paragraph from the novel, this phenomenon is illustrated by turning the woman on exposure within one page from a 'she' into an 'it':

"A black-haired woman adopts a creative attitude, whereby one can look inside her. She rotates around on a kind of potter's wheel...First she closes her thighs, you cannot see anything, but the heavy water of anticipation is already running around her teeth. Then she slowly spreads the downstairs and drives past countless other windows...Erika watches. The object of her peek desire just slides the hand between her thighs and shows that it enjoys by the mouth forming a small O. It closes its eyes, delighted that so many people are watching, and opens them again when they have been turned upwards. It raises the arms and massages the nipples so that they rise high. It sits comfortably and spreads its legs wide, and now one can peek inside the woman

from a frog's perspective... ...The cabins on the right have already seen the woman from the front, now the cabins on the left also must enjoy her front. Some prefer to judge a woman from the front, others prefer to judge from behind."

I don't want to classify any performative art as the same as these commercial sexual practices, but what they have in common, is the primal desire for looking at people.

Another obvious situation is the theatre setting. Above all, watching is what we go there for. Again, distance is one of the parameters that makes it theatre. Actors are on the one side, spectators on the other and distance is in between them. A play, spectacle or some sort of performance is staged in this space. Often there is a narrative; stories are told, and the actors are carrying out their actions of representing other people in other places doing other things. Sometimes there is a more associative open dramaturgy without a clear narrative, consisting of a collage of associations, but in most theatre settings the main feature is that there are people physically present with their bodies as carriers of images or meaning. Within this time and space there is room for feeling connected, for entertainment or interpretation, but the dominating activity on the spectators' side is usually to sit and watch. The framework determines the role of the audience: they are in the same space, watching the actors, usually without the possibility of attributing or intervening. Forced into this constructed role the possibility of an objective position from which observation can occur, is illusory. The

gaze is determined.

What exactly occurs among theatre spectators that cannot happen elsewhere, French philosopher

Rancière wonders in his book *'The emancipated spectator.'* "In a theatre, in front of a performance, there are only ever individuals putting their own paths in the forest of things, acts and signs that confront or surround them... It is their individual power to each translate what they see intellectually... What our performance [...] verify is not our participation in a power embodied in the community... It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else... In the capacity, exercised through associations and disassociations, the emancipation of every spectator consists... Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. It is our normal situation... Every spectator is already an actor in her story."<sup>77</sup> This is similar for watching visual artworks that have performance as its material or medium.



# Puke desire or the art of running

Letters to and from Martin Creed<sup>8</sup>

Dear Martin,

The world never goes well if you are involved in some kind of delusion, if you are trying to pretend that someone is not there.<sup>9</sup> That's how you feel like, you say.

How do you pretend someone is not there? Most likely by not looking at them. If you look at someone, you see them: they are there. In the action of consciously looking at someone, you acknowledge them.

Looking at people is what we do all the time. We look at people that know they are being watched. We look at people that don't know they are being watched. We glance at people at the bus stop, their bodies in an imaginary shop window, in the act of waiting. And if we ourselves are the people at the bus stop, we are often aware of ourselves, we see us in a bird's perspective kind of way; we are overly conscious of where we take position, how we move and what we look like. At this same bus stop we can also be busy with the act of not looking at each other. We take refuge in our phones. In this distant world that our phone is, again we watch people. We look at those that have put up an image of themselves to be watched without knowing who is watching. And when. Mediated through the interface of a social platform we watch and watch and watch. It is getting rarer for people to watch directly and consciously at events. We're likely to watch through a screen while making a recording of what we are watching. This is how our world has become: a mediated reality. Live watching is becoming a novelty.

The most tense and attentive way of watching people, though, I think, is live. You know, when we can only see it once and at that moment. When it happens in the now. Attentive ways of watching people, we find in sports and in performative arts, where the watchers have decided to actively look at others.

Trying to pretend someone is not there can have many reasons: shyness, anger, dislike, fear maybe? or inattentiveness...To make the world go a little better, we can make works that make us look at us.

How do we watch people in your work?

Yours truly,  
Marie

Dear Marie,

Trying to pretend someone isn't there, indeed, could be for any number of reasons, arrogance or whatever. But you have to accept that people are in the world. In my work, I try to include people actively, not just afterwards.<sup>10</sup> I like working with other people - I find it exciting.<sup>11</sup> A way to do it is like with the big painting *Work No. 2692*.<sup>12</sup> Each person did their bit on their own, while everyone else watched. They took it in turns, everyone was on stage, but also they had their own space, like a soloist in a jazz band. I think it is a lot like music, as you have the instructions, you have the parameters, the structure, the colors and the approaches worked out but then within that, the people are like musicians, and they have their bit where they are free to do whatever they want to do. Each person did their bit on their own while everyone else watched.<sup>13</sup>

Curiously, Martin

Dear Martin,

I like what you say on how the people are free to do whatever they want to do. This renders an outcome that is not solely yours. I would classify *Work No. 2692* as participatory art. The people are an extension for you as an artist making a painting. They mediate towards a work that is an object. It's a democratic working process with collective authorship. In this process they are participants, but they are also spectators since they watch each other. What I want to know is how you relate to the aesthetics of the performing bodies of the people, when their actual performance is the work. What these ways of working share, is that the initiative is yours, that you give instructions to the participants. Depending on the openness or restrictiveness of the instructions, there's a certain uncontrollability of the outcome. Is meaning created within the context? Any at all? In the presence, the poetry? What I mean is more visible in your *Work #850*.<sup>14</sup> You make runners run through the museum and its crowd in a 60m sprint. I don't know if these people were professional athletes. The instructions you gave were "run as if your life depends on it." Were those the only instructions you gave the athletes who performed this work? Were those the only parameters? Those simple instructions seem clear. Supposedly not much can go different, or wrong. But in a way the execution of the instructions is subjective: what is running as fast as you can? Everybody moves in their own way and the specific event is inimitable, unreproducible. It is never the same work. And it has a certain unpredictability: the audience in response must move as well, to get out of the runners' way. I saw this work in Voorlinden museum and we, the audience, had to position ourselves more consciously in the space. After all, you don't want to be in the way, right? Or ran into. Without being aware, a choreography was created with all of us taking part. In a sense this is some sort of participation as well.

Another thing: In your work there's minimal intervention and you allow familiarity to speak for itself. You do this with objects by arranging them by similarity or by serial repetitions. But you also do this in movement, by repetition of the same gesture. In one of your works<sup>15</sup> we see a film of a young woman entering an empty white space. Immediately she sticks

her hand in her mouth to trigger a big splash of vomit to come out. She repeats this several times, splashing vomit onto the floor for a minute. Then she exits the frame, leaving a big puddle of puke. We watch her vomiting without knowing who she is and what the context is. It is an intimate action that we don't often see, are not allowed to see, or perhaps don't even want to see. But we keep watching.

This work can be considered in the context of video and performance art of the 1960s in the United States and Europe in particular. Such work was often based on somewhat absurd, deliberately childish, abject, or dramatic actions performed before an audience or camera. I think of Paul McCarthy's video *Rocky form* 1976 in which McCarthy, dressed as a boxer, mimics the movie character Rocky. He is having an imaginary fight with another person, but also masturbates. As the film develops, it turns into a masochistic fight with himself. Masturbation, vomiting; stuff we really don't want to look at, but that we have an urge to look at. The vomiting of the young woman in your work triggers our nervous system, perhaps makes us feel sick. Would you call this response to the work empathetic? Is it some sort of physical empathy? It reminds me of Brecht, the German poet, playwright, and theatrical reformer, who had issues with empathy. Early in his career he said about playing to the heart: "they (the figures portrayed) ought to be presented quite coldly, classically, and objectively. For they are not matter for empathy; they are there to be understood. Feelings and private are limited. Against that the reason is fairly comprehensive and to be relied on."<sup>16</sup> Either way, empathizing or not, the urge to keep watching is immanent.

The one work I absolutely cannot stop watching is your video *Work no. 1701*.<sup>17</sup> The seven people in it are obviously real, but they are not as relatable to most of us. They each cross a zebra crossing in New York City in their own peculiar way, due to one disability or another. We are fascinated by their otherness. We can watch them shamelessly, because it is on video. There is a distance. In the video itself, we see bystanders turn into spectators. They must watch. It is uncomfortable and we feel either empathy, pity, or shame. But we must watch.

Were these disabled people filmed in one take? Could this have been done by trained actors? How on earth did you convince them to take part in this work?

We all want to be seen  
we all want to cross the road.  
Hope to hear from you,

Marie







Questions, questions, questions, Marie!

Running is an exciting action. It is also an example of being alive. If you think of death as being perfectly still, the opposite of death would be to move as fast as you possibly can.<sup>18</sup> Artworks degrade over time. Then it is a question of speed. Nothing lasts forever. It doesn't stay the same. You can't separate anything from people's experience. People are living beings who die. It basically means that nothing is ever the same from moment to moment. That made me think I should make work in the light of that. It has gotten me into making a lot of work that is basically more or less like a live event.

The idea for *Work no. 1701* was just to get all kinds of different people crossing the street. It came from this thing of people running. The running piece came from the idea that basically everything I do involves me moving my body. Moving my body comes before everything. It is like the first sign of life. So, I thought to try and make work with people moving their bodies. All I could think of was people moving as fast as they can to make it obvious that they were moving. And that led to people running. And after that I would get into trying to break down movement. I made a work with ballet dancers. I worked with ballet dancers 'cause ballet is like an off the shelf structure break down of different ways to move. And that led to the walking across the street. I wanted to try and have just people walking in all different ways. Because I like watching people move. And so, I just invited lots of people including a lot of disabled people who move in all eccentric different kind of ways. I contacted a lot of disabled charities. It is only a problem if you think of the people as victims. But I was asking them if they would do this. If they crossed the road from A to B, that would be a real thing.

It was a difficult work to make. It involved a lot of talking with the people who were doing it. I didn't want anyone to use apparatuses like walking sticks or wheelchairs. I wanted to show people moving across the world in all different ways. The way those people move across the street is a beautiful dance. It is full of life: it has got the difficulty of life in it as well as the beauty of life. The point is, that everyone is disabled in the sense that we're all struggling with our own difficulties, and everyone expresses themselves in the way that they move. When things are difficult, there's a lot in them.<sup>19</sup>

Basically, something that is ultimately under control is dead. That's the problem of life, and that's the problem of making work – how to narrow things down enough to be able to make something and not kill it, because the best works are alive.<sup>20</sup>

Plunge, Marie, plunge!

Martin

# Painting with people

## The aesthetics of people as a medium

The human body is not inanimate material. It is made up of gestures that the body is unable to forget, an infinity of performed or received gestures that shape the materiality of it.

What kind of people do we look at? In most theatre and performance settings we watch professional performers. They are trained, or very experienced, and usually they are on contract for their work. Another option is to work with untrained performers to create a work of art. Let's look at the meaning of 'untrained'. To be untrained in this context, is to not be taught, trained, or experienced and therefore not to be adept in any performing art that is watchable, like dance or theatre.<sup>21</sup>

'Untrainedness' as an artistic tool deals with the deconstruction of stage presence. When we consider the professional competence of performing as a tool or medium, unskilled performance is in itself unmediated: there is no purpose in-between the effort and the outcome it produces. It is not designed. No meaning is intentionally created. This phenomenon concerns the intention of the action. A professional actor will add an extra substance that an unprofessional actor will not. The latter will be more able to allow for things to happen. The non-professional performer can present instead of represent. Anyway, that is what an artist may aim for: a kind of neutrality in the performance. However, the awareness of being watched, creates a hyper attitude and an impulse to act differently, than one would in the privacy of not being watched. This goes for all performers, but untrained performers stay closer to neutrality. They have a way of acting that is unpretentious, honest, and

open. Perhaps even ugly. It is unambitious and fragile and has a certain poetic beauty to it. There's a sense of intimacy. The untrained stay closer to themselves. What we are looking at is not a character, but closer to a presentation of themselves, as they are. This can be relevant for a story an artist wants to tell about a certain kind or group of people, to address a social case for example.

Untrained performers have their own way of moving their bodies and will make different choices on the scene. Consciously or unconsciously. This leads to an uncontrollable, partly unpredictable outcome: instability. We can consider this to be a potentiality, a possibility not limited by any ability. It creates unconventional freedom. And a possibility of failure. Artists may choose to work with non-professional performers precisely because of this unexpected outcome. It can render images and ideas that artists could not have come up with themselves. Taking the risk of failure for granted or perhaps even aiming for that, the work can be divergent. This way of creating with this unstable medium, allowing to take risk, is where the process becomes interesting. To be vulnerable, to let go of the plan—not knowing exactly where it is going and trusting on the input of the performers, is an artistic expedition. It's a journey, shared with the performers. The question that arises then, is if we consider this as shared artistic ownership. Or are the performers and what they produce merely material, used by the artist? Who owns the presentation of the singular performer? Why would anyone want to use such a complex material? The question is whether

this method originates merely from an artistic choice or that it generates meaning. If we look at the artistic discourse of working with untrained performers, we have to look at the characteristics. To name a few characteristics: it is less costly, it is instruction based, it can become banal, and it involves risks. But above all, it is authentic, the most interesting and complex quality. Economically it can be a practical choice to work with untrained performers. If there is no budget, it is an option to ask unpaid performers to take part. An artist can recruit people from within her own social circle, or she can put out an open call to ask for volunteers.

Even though it is different from live performance, we find many examples of untrained actors in film making.

In his early work, famous filmmaker Peter Watkins started out of necessity to use 'ordinary people' and the actors from his amateur theatre group. Watkins "improvised as necessity and good fortune dictated. At one point, for instance, a tourist passed by on his way to a nearby chapel. In a matter of minutes, he was in a soldier's uniform and thrust against a wall, about to be shot."<sup>22</sup>

Having developed his own style, in the later 1950s, he shifted from necessity to the choice to use mainly non-professional actors. It became an important tool to increase awareness of the deceit of the media and its power to distort reality. In 2016, the now 86-year old filmmaker wrote on his website that he developed his 'newsreel style' to "substitute the artificiality of Hollywood and its high-key lighting, with the faces and feelings of real people.....In summary, my work with (mainly) non-professional actors has always been driven by a desire to add a dimension and a process to television, which it still lacks today: that of the public directly, seriously, and in depth participating in the

expressive use of the medium to examine history- past, present and future."<sup>23</sup>

Another film maker that uses 'real people' is the Swedish film maker Roy Andersson. His films are described as living paintings, in which ordinary people are used as paint. Andersson has his own studio and it's not for the lack of means that he uses 'real people'. He uses them as a presentation of reality, to show their struggle and failing as well as society's' daily failings and indignities. He is fascinated by how life's grandness, smallness and mortality appear much clearer in a hyper real way. Andersson's quest for authenticity means that he works primarily with non-professional actors. "Professional actors can too easily hide the authenticity, the body language, the moment, the dialogue. It would turn out too stylized. He wants a more raw, honest kind of acting. He shows the bleak and the beautiful, the absurd and the every day."<sup>24</sup> His work captures something ineffable.







# Authenticity in the age of authenticity

In working with unprofessional performers or 'regular people', their authenticity is most often mentioned as an asset. Authentic means 'of the same origin as claimed'. As a characteristic attributed to human beings, it is a complex phenomenon. If we talk about authenticity in a human individual, we talk about the subjective self. It describes us following our desires, motives, or beliefs, that are not only ours (as opposed to someone else's), but that also expresses who we truly are. Being oneself is inescapable: when we choose or act, it is we who is doing these things. We are able to think and reflect on our acting and being, as part of the wholeness of ourselves. Authenticity is not so much an exterior phenomenon; it ideals with our identity and the unique individuality of our inner self. Next to that, there is what we can see: the public self, which is out in the world, coping with that world and existing in relation to that world. It is how we view ourselves by others and how we fit in and take actions while in public.

So, the public self is visible, where the authentic is probably not. Movement, though, which is a seizable and visible phenomenon, is both interior and exterior. The production of original, unmediated, movement by the human body, derives partly from non-cognitive processes that have no cultural or social predetermination. In essence movement is meaningless. As long as there is no training or manipulation to make it come out differently from its original intention, as it is pristine, we could label congenital ways of moving our bodies as authentic. But since there is a difference between movement 'as is' and 'moving

while being watched', I think we should be looking for another term. I prefer to use the word 'neutrality' to appoint the quality of the performativity of movement that stays as close to the original movement as possible. Untrained performers often possess this quality. Or have not yet lost it completely.

Often authentic is confused with that which is 'original', meaning that it exists in the same form from the beginning. Our authentic selves, however, are constantly changing, until the end, which is death. Followed by decay, which is also a process of change. And change is movement.

From an ethical point of view, we can even question its value: is it any better to be authentic than to be inauthentic? In contemporary culture we like to think so. Authenticity is one of the highest values, an obsession almost. Man should live according to the originality of their individual expression. Most of us are looking for authentic and real experiences. Buying a product is buying a unique story, with which we want to identify, we purchase based on self-image. The experience economy and creative industry are booming, selling unique experiences around brands by distinction and 'uniqueness'. Disneyfication, imagineering and storytelling are examples of the current rendering of authenticity. It is a misconception that authenticity can be created. We are buying a perception of it. And we like to believe it to be true. In a rapidly changing world, we want to hold on to the original, the true and the real. Because it is what we know. Authenticity is often associated with



'aesthetics'. In *Artificial hells*, Claire Bishop says that "The aesthetic regime of art, ushered in with the Enlightenment, continues today. It permits everything to be a potential subject or material for art, everyone to be a potential viewer of this art, and denotes the aesthetic as an autonomous form of life."<sup>25</sup>

Thinking of realness in art, we can consider the use of the everyday as a subject matter in itself. Duchamp presenting his readymades in the museum demonstrates that in principle anything can be art. Also, Fluxus showed us that art can resemble reality to any chosen degree. The performativity of the real can be more

enlightened, disclosing and rewarding than that of carefully constructed, fictional representations. Fluxus claimed that the question is not which are the art works, but how we view anything as we see it as art. The distance between the artwork and the everyday requires disconnecting specific aspects of the commonplace from its original rawness, like its aesthetic qualities or its peculiarity. What is it that makes this particular object or action special? It is making an aesthetic choice before the presentation. In working this way it's not the art to show something new, but to show it anew.



# The authentic body in performance art

While film and television profits from the interest in the real, it is theatre, that can generate the real for real, because of the liveness and the proximity of the spectator. Peggy Phelan, American feminist scholar and one of the founders of Performance Studies International, states that "Performance's only life is the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance."<sup>26</sup>

The theatre stage is one of the few places where the human body is given time to become (an) image. In the twenty-first century performance is more involved with meaning, politics, and society. It regards personal experience, often involving the body and/or the sense of self. Performance art can be seen as an attempt to scrutinize the arbitrariness of life, in its transience, mystery and absurdity.

To put the human body and its authenticity (or neutrality) and phenomenology in performance art in perspective, we should look at a bit of history.

We have to go back to the moment where the bodies of the audience and the choices they make, become part of the work.

John Cages' 1952 performance, which later came to be known as '*Theater Piece No. 1*,' is regarded as the first multimedia

'Happening'. It was a collaborative theatrical event that included simultaneous solos of dance, poetry readings and a lecture, along with slides, film, painting, and phonographic recordings. The audience was seated in the middle of the space, facing each other, on chairs that were diagonally arranged. They were unable to directly see everything that was happening. Merce Cunningham, who danced in the performance, mentions a dog that chased him around the space, while he was dancing. "Nothing was intended to be other than it was, a complexity of events that the spectators could deal with as each chose."<sup>27</sup>

A few years later, in 1959, the American painter Allan Kaprow created '*18 Happenings in 6 Parts*'. Working from a scripted score, he created an interactive environment that manipulated the audience. They were given cards with instructions for their participation. Where Cage encouraged the participation of audience members for his desire to relinquish authorial control, in many of Kaprow's happenings audience members became props for the execution of his vision. Kaprow called this audience to not be passive, but to be "closer to the role of a Greek chorus, without its specific meaning necessarily, but with its required place in the overall scheme."<sup>28</sup>

"I think that it is a mark of mutual respect that all persons involved in a Happening be willing and committed participants who have a clear idea what they are to do. This is simply accomplished by writing out the scenario or score for all and discussing it thoroughly with them beforehand. In this respect it is not different from the

preparations for a parade, a football match, a wedding or religious service. It is not even different from a play. The one big difference is that while knowledge of the scheme is necessary, professional talent is not; the situations in a Happening are lifelike or if they are unusual, are so rudimentary that professionalism is actually uncalled for. Actors are stage-trained and bring over habits from their art that are hard to shaken off; the same is true of any other kind of showman or trained athlete. The best participants have been persons not normally engaged in art or performance, but who are moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods.”<sup>29</sup>

The history of art with a participative element is extensive. We pursue here to look at the performer that is not *part of* the audience, but *in front of* an audience. If we look at performance art and the use of real people as the medium, we meet the complexity of looking at the same time at real bodies as image carriers, and people as ontological beings. They are individuals who consist of identity, history, and language. The cultural body tells its story, we can read its descent and all its hereditary, cultural, psychological, and sociological information. Using ‘regular people’ solely because of their ‘authenticity’ is dubious if their ‘authenticity’ would be the subject matter. Hiring non-professionals (or specialists in other fields) to be present and perform at a particular time and particular place on behalf of the artist, is referred to as delegated performance. In this type of work performers are following the artists instructions. There is a tendency to have them perform their own socio-economic category, just be what they are. When non-professionals are asked to perform an aspect of their identities, it might be called ‘live installation’. It reminds us of

the Congolese that King Leopold put on exposure. The difference is that in this case, it is voluntarily and paid for. Even though this voluntariness is questionable. Spanish artist Santiago Sierra started making works where he put low-paid workers on display. He continued by staging performances that consist of people undertaking banal or humiliating tasks, while getting paid minimum wage. Sierra has been heavily criticized for exploiting his subjects. Discussions about the ethics of representation arose. His work doesn’t generate empathy for the people put on exposure, but rather a nonidentification: “this is not me.”

In Sierras’ case, his attention on the economic systems and the financial transactions made for the creation of the work, are primary aspects of his work. There’s an emphasis on the phenomenological immediacy of these live bodies.

In looking at other people that are put on some sort of exposure, we draw attention to otherness. It can create thoughts like ‘they are the same as us’ or ‘they are other than we’, anthropological questions of singularity and commonality.

There is a difference in using people as a character or a representation or idea of a ‘human’ and bodies and their corporal materiality as a medium of the work. The latter is a sculptural starting point. Bodies and the way in which they execute a performative task, is very much like dance. When we are talking about the authenticity in the performance, we mean the original, blank state of being and moving. Perhaps innocent, unspoiled. As is. It is about the technique, or the lack of technique, of movement and its aesthetic value. In this regard authenticity is the way the body moves, the organization of the body and how that is specific, and different for every person. It is how we look into the world and communicate with the world. It is



the clothes we wear and the look in our eyes. It is also who and what we are. Every body has its own story. It touches on the poetry of real life; things that are, without representing that they are anything.

An early example of using the real in movement is Judson Dance.<sup>30</sup> Based in New York in the 1960's, the Judson Dance Theater borrowed Cunningham's and Cage's hazard and random processes, rejecting existing ideas about ballet and modern dance to research choreographic form, and the vision on the body. They experimented with emphasizing on everyday gestures and movements as the basis for choreographic intervention. Sometimes they used untrained performers and dancers, which yielded the discovery of new dimensions of movement. Al Carmine, Pastor at Judson Memorial Church said: "the primary movements of living and the primary sounds of life seemed to be used in all their 'ordinariness' to create a powerful aesthetic experience, but one which was not 'arty' or 'pretty' or 'moving' in the usual sense. Suddenly the simple facts of moving, standing, kneeling, crouching, lying down, listening, seeing, smelling, touching, not-touching, took on what I can only call a kind of classicism."<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the most influential aspect of Judson's legacy was not the work they produced, but the lens through which they regarded their work. They promoted the concept that anything could be looked at as dance and ultimately redefined what counted as dance. Judson Dance finds its direct lineage in contemporary choreography such as Jérôme Bel's 2001 *The Show Must Go On* in using everyday movements. Several of these strands come together in Martin Creed's *Work n. 850* of the sprinters in the gallery.

The recreation and reenactment of historical events, like for example The

*Battle of Orgreave*, a work from 2001, in which the artist Jeremy Deller reenacted the 1984 miners' strike, is another way of using untrained actors for the creation of a work of art. Deller gave his participants rather strict instructions, but allowed for formal looseness and even improvisation. This work's power is in its singularity, and not in its reconstruction of past events. The re-enactment was a combination of clear conceptual premise and partially unpredictable realization. This way of working is referred to as directed reality. An alternative to the transfiguration of the real is relational aesthetics. It is a term created by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s. In relational aesthetics we move from objects to inter-human relations as the subject matter. It has its focus on a durational experience by an intervention in, or recreating of, an everyday situation. The distance is gone. The spectator is in the middle of it.

Bourriaud states in his book *Relational Aesthetics* that "the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be way of living and models of action within the existing real."<sup>32</sup> The audience participates interactively, thus becoming part of the work. The emphasis is on the performance and the process. The audience has a double role in both being the observer and the observed. They are part of the work.

The work of Thai contemporary artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, who has been regularly cited by Bourriaud, is a well-known example of relational art. His work is fundamentally about bringing people together. In the early 1990s he made installations in museum spaces that involved cooking meals for visitors. For example, in the work *Untitled (Free)* from 1992, visitors were invited to take dehydrated Chinese soups that were provided in the gallery, add boiling water to them and eat them at the spot.





In the essay *The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum*, historian Rosalind Krauss says that “the new orientation to experience involves both a new approach to the physicality of the body and a kind of utopian gesture. A spectator becomes alienated from his own experiences in daily life and is reconnected through performative art with the own experiences from which they had become estranged. This is, because through the performative art, the viewer becomes more focused on his own experiences and thus on his own body. This means that this experience will play a much greater role than it did in the autonomous visual arts of earlier times.”<sup>33</sup>

Forwarding to the current century, we can't go around the 'constructed situations' of Tino Sehgal who studied dance and political economy and has been a dancer with the French experimental choreographers Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy. In his choreographic pieces, that are staged in museums and galleries, he wants to create meaning. He uses the human body as material, giving art a new material foundation, but the works nonetheless claims the status of visual artworks. They are executed by professionally trained individuals that he refers to as 'interpreters'. The 'constructed situations' are live encounters in which the interpreters often engage with the visitors to have them participate in constructing the piece. The spectator often triggers the work and has a responsibility in the shaping of the work. It only exists there and in that moment for her, which offers her empowerment. This 'empowerment' is a crucial aspect of the work. The spectator is constantly asking herself if, and how, she should be looking at, or responding to the interpreters. The instructions are simple and allow for individual variation and everyday aesthetics. The idea that in principle anything can be art

is in Sehgal's perspective constricted to the parameters of physical materiality. Sehgal's work does not refer to reality but emerges from the transformation of a given situation. He works on the everyday and the banal and chooses pop culture to be more intelligible to the public. He is interested in the means, in the 'without qualities,' the nondescript. This comes close to the neutrality, we have been talking about. The work is not allowed to be recorded, increasing its ephemeral existence and the possibility for an open ending. The transmission of the work is only through memory and the body. There is a clearly defined way to execute the work, but there is no fixed original and the way of interpreting it, co-defines the work. It stays open and subject to modification. There is no fixed meaning or end point, only changeability.

One of his early works is the piece *'Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing dan and bruce and other things'*, which was created in 2000. In the empty exhibition space, a person is lying on the floor, moving very slowly through the room. Her body is never still, constantly moving, with no emphasis on any particular movement. She seems introvert, not making contact, as if in another world. Nothing in her movements suggests that she's addressing the viewer. It seems that she moves unintentionally, the body becoming an object. The slowness gives the movements a sculptural quality. She is moving automatically through a sequence without beginning or end, seemingly without the intention to express something specific.

The title of the piece refers to Bruce Nauman and Dan Graham who both used dance and movement in making works of visual art. The difference is that they represented the body through a mediated image, namely video, which produced a



lasting object. Sehgal on the other hand introduces the live choreographed body as choreographed body, to become a work of visual art. The use of choreography causes temporality. Even though it's repeatable, it exists in the moment and is different every time it is performed.

# Impossibility of neutrality in performance

Imagine a cardboard box.

YOU SEE IT? What is it doing?

Now imagine a person, your neighbor for example. What is she doing? Nothing? Look better. What do you think she is doing? You probably pictured her motionless, the first try. Perhaps when you try again, she might move. And when you imagine a little longer, you might add a narrative to it, or have an opinion about her. She is causing something. She rises above her materiality.


And what is the box doing? Nothing. The box is a shaped piece of cardboard doing nothing, other than being a shaped piece of cardboard. The box is absolutely neutral.

We can't see bodies solely as material, but we can approximate a material quality that I mentioned before: 'neutrality' in performance. It is a rather difficult phenomenon, which is hard to explain to anybody not involved in acting or performing. It is a state of being objective in a performative situation, that has a specific material quality of the performer doing nothing more than being, existing. Being neutral, or objective, concerns the act of being instead of acting, of achieving something very small and hardly visible. It's an almost meditative emptiness. What is difficult for a performer, is that less fulfilment is achieved from leaving something out, than from doing something. It is undoing something. Neutrality is difficult to grasp or reproduce. The untrained performer unconsciously approximates this state. Neutralities' realness can be valuable in art production

because it translates nothing: it is. Like cardboard. As being neutral concerns the act of being and not acting, it can be an important difference between theatre and performance art.

To understand the phenomenon of neutrality, I want to discuss shortly how theatrical consciousness, that gets in its way, is attracted. It is a skill that the trained body cannot get rid of. It is close to impossible to unlearn.

There are many different acting schools and techniques, like for example Stanislavski, Adler and Method acting. These techniques start from a psychological approach in which the actor draws on her own experiences to shape a character. Other schools work with a physical approach: from movement. In the 1990's the HKU acting department worked with the Lecoq<sup>34</sup> method, in which acting is approached as a kinetic art. Jacques Lecoq's idea was that people develop on the basis of mimesis. They make the world their own, by imitating it in their own language of the body. In using his technique, the HKU taught their students a physical visual sign language. It was focused on the energy of the gesture, the internal movement, the dynamics of postures and the spacial movement. All movement being preceded by internal movement, many exercises were done to be impressed by everything around and subsequently give expression to these impressions. An important exercise was the 'étude', a series of simple movements, that were to be studied and repetitively imitated. It could consist of a study how one sits, stands or raises an arm. These and other, mainly physical, exercises grew a physical awareness and virtuosity to create an



obvious presence. This means to rise above casualness and to give shape to a poetic and rhetoric body image, which is experiential and functional-compositional at the same time. Both body and mind were imprinted to be able to perform, but mostly on the unconscious physical memory. The body was approached as an instrument, many hours of practice to play it. Just like learning to ride a bicycle or to play the piano: doing it over and over again, it becomes part of the physical memory. You will never forget how to do it. Even if you would want to let go of it, while performing, you will never forget the mobility<sup>35</sup> and the rendering of (a) stage presence. It happens. It is part of you and overshadows neutrality. This instrument you cannot put away. You are the instrument. Where unskilled pianoplayers will play 'interesting' piano pieces, untrained performers are what they are. And being no more than that, they can stay closer to neutrality. It is about doing nothing or not doing it.

"You can't really know what you are doing at the time, because you're in the moment yourself. You are not aware really of what you are doing. It's like body language. It's probably really clear to someone else what you're like, but you can't really know what you're like at the time."<sup>36</sup> Martin Creed says in an interview. As a trained performer, you do know what you are doing. And that's the problem.

# Nine principles

## Instruction based performance

Letters to and from Romeo Castellucci <sup>37</sup>

Dear Romeo,

At the Holland Festival in 2011, I saw your piece 'On the concept of the face, regarding the son of God' from 2010. Center stage in a hyper-realistic scene, a son was taking care of his sick old father, who was lying in a bed most of the time. A massive reproduction of Antonello da Messina's 15th-century Christ Blessing stared silently from the back wall down upon them, but also watched everyone in the audience. The painting's impassivity drove the play into its second movement, when the two performers went to the side and a group of children entered the stage. They were around the age of 10, each carrying a bag that was filled with toy grenades. One by one they threw the grenades at the huge portrait of the Christ. When they ran out of grenades, they left again and the two actors, who played the father and son, returned. Most children would have had no, or little, experience in performing, which produced a certain purity or neutrality in their performance. Is that what you were looking for? Did you envision a certain stage presence or were their bodies degraded into objects? Were they subjected to the artwork?

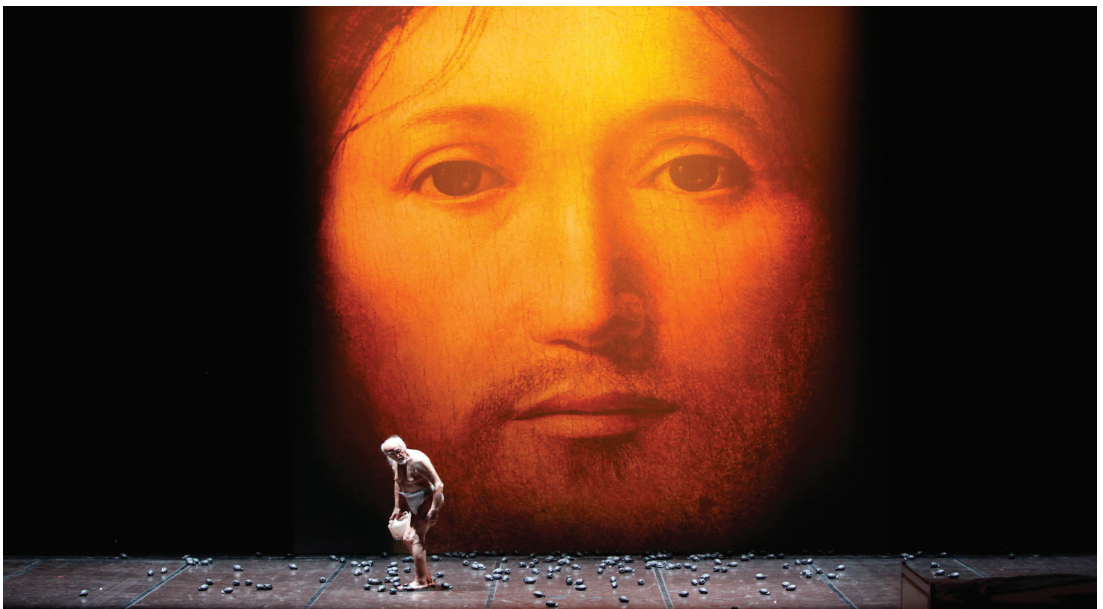
Working with untrained performers is usually instruction based. Simple instructions, which are not too difficult to carry out, creates space for the performer to trust upon his own capabilities. Did you rehearse with these children or just give them instructions?

What is the difference to you in theatre and performance art?

I am interested in your approach.

Grazie,

Marie



Dear Marie,

Every time the play was staged, we recruited the children from the area the theatre was in. They participated because they liked to do so. They were selected by looking a certain age, around ten or twelve years old. They came to the theatre once before, to get instructed by my assistant about when to enter and exit, and where on stage to put their bags down. Throwing was just throwing. I only met them myself afterwards.

There are no adults in that particular scene. It's just the children on stage and it's children who throw the toy grenades. Innocents against an innocent. (Jesus, ML) The violence is in the gesture of the adult.<sup>38</sup>

This performance was not exact, not rehearsed. The relationship with mimesis is much easier in a 'performance' than in a theatrical performance. The performers also participate more directly. The ideology of a 'performance' also differs from that of a theatre performance. It is in a sense fast, because it is about one gesture, maximum two. The passage must therefore also go quickly and is based on the level of daily life.<sup>39</sup>

The theatre that I seek and practice, is never an interpretation or a commentary on something pre-existing. I seek the total presence of a body that is dense and tangible; I seek the line of force that emerges from a cold, visual objectivity that withdraws matter from reality and from time.<sup>40</sup>

Saluti,  
Romeo

Dear Romeo,

Thank you for your honest response. I am overwhelmed by the highly philosophical comments on your work.

On the concept of what was said to be an ode to compassion, a meditation on the sacred power of art and an examination of suffering and dignity. And possibly your most personal conversation with God. All very big words. I know you lost your father at a young age and perhaps it is also about these kinds of personal real things?

Performativity of the real as a more sophisticated, revealing and rewarding domain has potentially become more valid in postmodern consciousness. More so even than that of constructed fictional representations. I think you do both.

In examining ways of making art with people as a theatrical material, without it being theatre, I am thinking a lot about the body. Choreography, scenario and script or instructions are agreements for people to move upon performatively, whereas improvisation is perhaps more spontaneous and surprising. The possible hybridity of those two forms might be confusing and disturbing. Or it can be a freer way of exploring the use of the body in relation to movement, space, other bodies and the transmission of knowledge.

Another thing I keep wondering about concerning the complexity of your work, is whether you think the audience is capable of independently and actively interpreting and translating the image offered to them. Philosopher Jacques Rancière defends in his *Emancipated spectator* an aesthetics in which the artist does not transmit superior knowledge to an

ignorant and passive spectator. Rather than a transmission of knowledge, the image emerges as an alien entity, that the artist and spectator verify together. In order to do so the theatre conventions 'once upon a time' and 'pretending' need to be broken. The significance is in the tangible presence of the performer that emphasizes the presence of the human being. It is stating we are there. Stating that we have bodies.

This summer, 2021, you moved out of the theatre and for the first time conceived an action in public space. With the city of Brussels as a background of the action you created Buster, a site-specific work in which you used performers that were not professional actors. They were citizens of Brussels who lend their bodies to actions that were not theirs. One could consider the moving of bodies as puppetry; objects being moved. When you look at it as just an act of showing, it might appear rather empty. What was your intention? This is the first time you have conceived an action in a public space.

Thankfully yours,  
Marie

Dear Marie,

Since it took place in front of the central building of the Brussels Police Station, the mimesis could not have been more pronounced. The surprising thing was the lack of any criminal action. The police seemed to move around a void. The armed corps were not present as part of a linear narrative. Something interfered with the codes, that were no longer logical or moral. The policemen were also subjected to the law, since they were victims of the commands they continually received from invisible earpieces, from which they had no escape. The interpreters were not chosen through a casting, they came from the street, after responding to an open call. They inhabited the scene without rehearsals, they have not learned a role "to play", they learned it while obeying orders given through small earphones. The interpreters – citizens of Brussels – agreed to a protocol, to 'become policemen'. They made a sort of oath and accepted the list of conditions. Buster was constructed on nine principles:

01. The action requires the participation of about forty men.
02. They are not actors, but protagonists of the scene.
03. There are no rehearsals.
04. Each of them is given a policeman's uniform and a pair of invisible headphones.
05. Each of them receives, in real time, specific individual commands.
06. Each policeman must fulfil the order received.
07. No improvisation is requested from the policemen, but the abyss of an absolute present.
08. The policeman and the actor are one and the same thing.
09. The action takes place during the night, in the city center of Brussels.

The interpreters submitted to their orders. Their task was to execute a dense series of commands without wavering. And, inevitably, their orders procured the necessary disorder. There was no room for conscious thought there, nor for choice. There was no time. They must obey immediately, without thinking. Time was compressed into an absolute present,

an abyss where only the command and its instantaneous fulfilment existed. These were pseudo-actors and, as such, the only protagonists. The actor and the action were one and the same thing, they overlapped. This is a way of doing away with the concept of identification in acting, which consisted simply in one's own actions, precisely because there was no room and no time for psychology. The policemen were taken off guard and relieved of their responsibility. They didn't know what they were doing, like the Soldiers of Jesus, they just did it. <sup>41</sup>

In my theatre work it goes very quickly, the realization. The repetitions are only a test of ideas. The ideas are right, or not. I don't believe in repetition as an expressive and creative moment. However, there is a structure which must be absolutely precise in the details. The macrostructure becomes sfocato, in English blurred. The focus is only on the details. The general structure, what is it? You have to be really precise in the details. So, improvisation just doesn't make sense to me. The work with the actors neither. The repetition becomes a moment of resistance between the idea and the realization. You have to have the shortest repetition possible. Sometimes realization can corrupt the idea. Maybe it's a neo-Platonic reflection, I don't know, but it's true that the idea is the fundamental structure of this theater. Who passes, if you will, through the paradox of matter, energy, body ... it's absolutely true but first there is the idea.

If you do rehearsals, it becomes theater. Then the thing can fall into another dimension that I will not recognize. <sup>42</sup>

My work has moved away from storytelling in the sense of a book. It's not narration in that sense. It's more like telling a dream. There are only details, no general context. In the dream, there is always a lack. There is not enough information, you cannot understand everything. And like in the dream, you know that when there is a lack, it is precisely there to look for it.

I don't want to see reality. I hate the real. My work is to suspend the real. With another reality, but it is of another order. Where there is no blood. They are empty bodies, they are meats of form. Shape is the key word. When you see things that appear to be naturalistic, this is precisely where there is the maximum amount of abstraction. This is not a play on words. It's really like that for me. These are forms that are being released into space. Also animals. Sometimes I use real animals, and sometimes they are stuffed.

Confusion is another important word. Everything merges, but in the confusion there is great precision. In this confusion, the human being is confronted with the animal, the man with the woman, the old man with the child. There is confusion in this sense. Confusion then becomes a kind of discipline. <sup>43</sup>

Basta!

Romeo

# The amateur title

Is it possible for professionals to act as unprofessionals? What happens then?

Erik Kessels<sup>44</sup> says he gets most of his inspiration from the naivety of amateurs, and the mistakes they make. They do it unconsciously because they are open-minded, and they break rules because they don't know the rules. Their mistakes are special when everything seems to be perfect, and mistakes are excluded. It is not possible to imitate amateurs. "If you try it, it is obvious. It starts from working towards a goal, which is different from originating in the moment. It is no longer authentic."<sup>45</sup> says Kessels. One of the core qualities of an amateur is that she is inimitable.

In *Zonder Titel*, Lex ter Braak, director at Fonds BKVB (Fonds voor beeldende kunsten, vormgeving en bouwkunst), distinguishes between hobbyist, amateur, professional, and artist. The hobbyist engages solely for her own entertainment. The amateur does this as well, but often has some ambition. The professional makes money producing art, and may or may not, see herself as an artist. The artist, who can be all the above, has usually followed an education, but most of all wants to research the individuality of her practice. She engages more in research, experiment and looking for answers. There's a difference in intention: the artist creates, discovers, and makes something new. The idea comes before the conception. The amateur imitates and recreates. Amateur practice is based on the principle of pleasure, of desire. Every amateur is in the process of becoming and will never become as accomplished as a professional. The term professional is determined by institutions. In effect, so is the term amateur. Both terms

might disappear in the future.

"The amateur is not necessarily defined by a lesser knowledge, an imperfect technique ...but rather by this: he is the one who does not exhibit, the one who does not make himself heard. The meaning of this occultation is as follows: the amateur seeks to produce only his own enjoyment. (...) once he exhibits and makes himself heard, once he has a public, his enjoyment must come to terms with an 'imago,' which is the discourse the Other offers about what he does."<sup>46</sup>

There has been a tendency to turn to amateur-like art forms in a search for expanding the possibilities. Think of outsider art, primitive art and popular culture. The discourse about the amateur as a neo-romantic cult figure is mainly considering visual arts, or at least object-oriented art. In this context everything outside the body, like a song, video or written text, is considered an object. In performative arts there are no tools outside the human body, they coincide. Adding to the distinctions mentioned before, I consider in performative arts a fifth category, which comes even before the hobbyists: the absolutely inexperienced. So where do we find such modes of acting, the just being? It is an irrational quality. Absolute neutrality can be found in animals, young children, people with dementia and perhaps hypnotized people. But they are unaware. If a purposely neutral attitude is acquired by people that are aware that they are performing, the inexperienced will come the closest to it.





It is very unlikely though, that these people are willing to engage in a performative act on their own account. They can be invited by an artist to participate to be ‘used’ as a medium. “The visual characteristics, style and technique of the amateurish, the unfinished, imperfect, improvised, cheap, etc. are fully deployed as a more general aesthetic strategy in current art production.”<sup>47</sup> The inexperienced and untrained performer acts unintentionally, without hindrance of preconception. There’s not much noise in between input and output. They start from emptiness; everything is still open. Their mind is open, it is a state of artistic naivety. It is most interesting if they don’t desire to be or become a performer or artist, if they can let even go of that. The only ambition is to act within that moment upon instruction. And perhaps have fun. So, what neutrality comes down to is staying close to the authentic, letting go of control and not attempting anything. It is close to nothingness. A nothingness that is framed by the parameters of the artist who turns it into a work of art.

# A possibility of failure

Loss, defeat, frustration ...

negative words for the thing called failure

And nonperformance, that too.

In working with untrained performers there is a possibility for failure. One could call it failure if the artists outcome is different than intended, but often it is used for the aesthetic effects of chance and risk.

Failure is also trying to be or to achieve. But what are we trying to achieve? Failure is a state going toward something else. It is in motion. It creates possibilities for things to happen. It's not a conclusion.

Failure is a blank page



So we took a breath.  
Time to consider if failure even exists.  
“must go, on can’t go on, will go on”<sup>48</sup>

When we talk about failure, there’s no way to ignore the famous writer. Samuel Beckett knew that he would only fail more spectacularly every time he tried. To fail. Not only is Beckett famous for his quote on it, failure was one of his quests in life. In his writing he sought to create its formal artistic shape. He was pursuing failure, trying to expose it. “Beckett is concerned with the necessary defeat of every human endeavor, of all efforts at communication, and of language itself.”<sup>49</sup>

Is it possible to pursue pure failure? Is it not a contradiction in terms? Do we fail if we don’t fail enough? Can we fail better? What was failure to Beckett?

Let us look at the whole phrase of the popular quote:

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. First the body. No. First the place. No. First both. Now either. Now the other. Sick of the either try the other. Sick of it back sick of the either. So on. Somehow on. Till sick of both. Throw up and go. Where neither. Till sick of there. Throw up and back. The body again. Where none. The place again. Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. Till sick for good. Throw up for good. Go for good. Where neither for good. Good and all.”<sup>50</sup>

These days the quote is used as encouragement to improve. But failure to Beckett was not about progress or endurance. It was about the incomprehensible nature of being and not-being: the paradox of emptiness and presence, of birth and death. Beckett’s ‘failing better’ is not a failure to create something, but rather a failure to de-create something, to undo something that refuses to be undone. Like the neutrality or

objective presence in performance that is close to impossible.

Beckett teaches us that failure is not a goal. It’s a secondary outcome. And success is not its opposition. There’s an essential identification of success with failure. It’s fluid. It’s process. If you let go of pressure to succeed it creates an opening: a possibility for something else to happen. That’s not negation. It defeats loss.

In the artists own words:” I’m working with impotence, ignorance. I don’t think impotence has been exploited in the past. There seems to be a kind of aesthetic axiom that expression is an achievement—must be an achievement. My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable—as something by definition incompatible with art. I think anyone nowadays, anybody who pays the slightest attention to his own experience, finds it the experience of a non-knower, a non-can-er.”<sup>51</sup>

Impotence as the new blankness. So much for Beckett.

# Failing in the age of prosperity

The modern cult of success refuses to reintegrate failure back into success. Success is the bitch goddess.<sup>52</sup> We look at failure as breakdown. It is a diminishing of energy, of our being, with death as the final score. It turns us into dissatisfied creatures. It makes us sick. We are detached from our bodies. The aging of the human body is perceived as failure. The idea that life is manufacturable, makes many strive for eternal youth, immortality even. In silencing failure, they have become superfluous images of technology.

Instead of fighting failure, we could try and embrace it. Like the Stoics did. They used a strategy of being mindful to protect the ethical integrity of the inner self in the very midst of failure. Their response was resignation: let it be. One meets failure and can do little about it. It's beyond human control. They WERE not failure. This tends towards a state of neutrality: an awareness of being finite, an honest relation with universal impermanence. So, failure shows us what's beyond our control. You either fight it, or you leave it. When we appreciate failure, we can give it a platform to show its impact and its possibilities. How better to approach this than in art? Art has ways to encounter it, explore it and address it. Artists have the opportunity to fail. Or very well be failure. Especially when the chosen material has a mind of its own.

The most complex and chaotic material to create with is the matter of human existence. In visual arts the use of the performing human body can be a presentation of ourselves and our otherness. When employed in a neutral way

the proposals of the artist can materialize into sculptural qualities. But in dealing with people that have no experience in performing, we risk an unsure material outcome. And within a temporal frame, if the performance is live, we have little control. Perhaps things don't work out as intended. There is an opportunity for boredom to kick in. Or even chaos. But it is also an opportunity for unexpectedness to happen. What to call this? Nothingness? In betweenness?

It brings us back to Samuel Beckett, who was trying to reveal the faults and limits of representation itself and had an obsession with language as an inadequate tool for description of the phenomenal. Like Beckett, who tried and tried again, I cannot put the phenomenon into words. Blankness? Absolute nothingness? Wordlessness? Impotence?

Silence?

Or just call it failure?

Breath  
breath  
breath

*silent buzzing getting attention*

breath some **more**

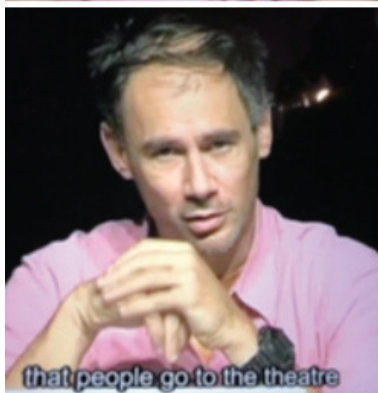
don't move  
no moving  
it is possible  
cuts some slack  
if you blink  
as fast as you can

Watch out, you  
Don't think, you  
that you can  
don't think  
like starfish do

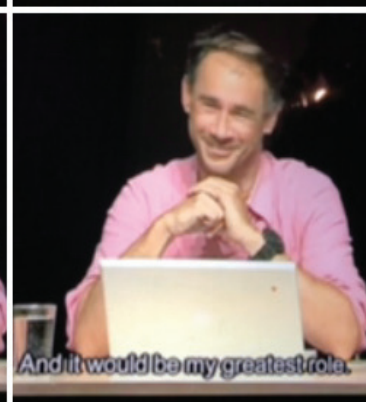
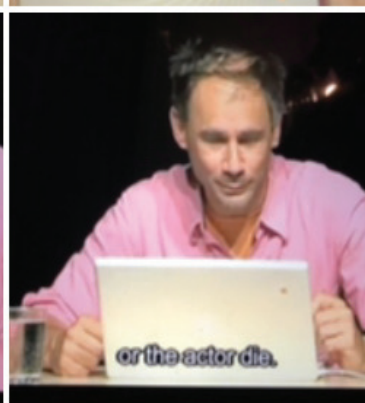
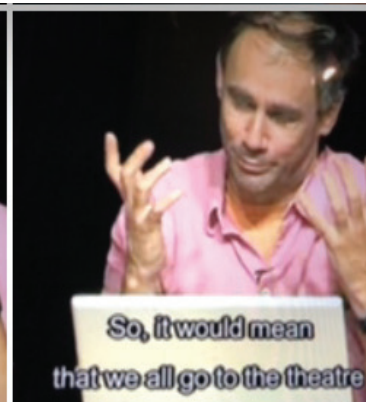
and do not think  
still in the middle  
motionless  
frozen

do not think

go on







# Breathless bodies

Jérôme Bel is a French dancer and choreographer, whose choreographic style is defined as non-dance. In his work, many of the subjects discussed in this thesis, come together. Bel has been concerned with notions of authorship, subjectivity, agency in dance, the role of the audience and the uniqueness of the body. His productions rebel against modernist dance ideology and its conception of the natural body. Instead, he conceives the body as a cultural construct to be read. Bel uses ordinary movement, non-dancers, and prefers to study the conditions in which dance is staged, rather than focus on dance itself. Instead of choreography he refers to his works as 'artistic acts'. Working on a complex notion of stage presence, Bel disrupts the conventional perception of the division between performer and audience, the educated professional and the amateurs lacking any technical skills, and between what is regarded as a success on stage. Or as failure. He focuses on those we are watching as well as the way we watch: with a longing for imaginary perfection and the need to judge, but with room for identification and empathy as well. He tries to make us more aware of our act of watching.

In 1998, as he wanted it to be his last one, he called his fourth production '*Le dernière spectacle*' (the last performance). He aspired to make a piece in which he would find the philosopher's stone of the theatre, reveal the theatre and find its solutions. After that, he would do something completely different, like breeding dogs. He discovered this was a pretentious and naïve idea, that he could not accomplish. Soon after that he was asked for another project.

To continue, he came up with the solution that choreographer Xavier le Roy would take up the project, and that Bel would take the credits and name the piece: *Xavier Le Roy*. Claiming that he always likes to imagine that every new show is the last one, over two decades later he is still at it. Fortunately, he never really could say goodbye. After having had a vacation, he felt the need to work again and found the name for his next production: *The Show Must Go On*. In this 2001 work, a cast of 20 actors, who were non-dancers, performed their own genuine and bizarre moves to well-known pop songs, played by a DJ, a role for Bel himself. In choosing to use popular songs as a material, he chose a material that belongs to everyone. The text of the songs defined the actions on stage.

In *Gala* from 2015, a mixed cast of professional dancers and amateurs with backgrounds, ages, and life experiences as diverse as possible, perform together. The show covered different dance styles and fragments of stories, which built up an inventory of a dance 'with no particular qualities' and brought out all the possible relationships that are unique to the body and voice. In this collective art form, the dancers casually performed in a series of exercises, their own learned and imagined versions of dance routines. Using modern dance, folk dance, baton twirling, and hip-hop allowed each dancer to feature his or her individual strengths and weaknesses. In this different approach, we watched dance that might be fragile and precarious without judging it to common standards. It revealed the way in which each person's cultural repertoire involves them in a singular

# Two letters to and from Jérôme Bel<sup>53</sup>

Dear Jérôme,

Traditional dance often aims for uniformity; all dancers move more or less the same. For you there is not one way to move, no right or wrong way. You invite all sorts of people on stage to create altruistic portraits of each person as a dancer, using their bodies in their own way. You put emphasis on vulnerability. The use of (let's call them) amateurs, or unprofessional performers to show inherent potential, could be called authentic. I could not catch you using this word as such, but you do talk about uniqueness. Was the aesthetics of their uniqueness your starting point in working with amateurs or did it present itself to you in the process? Perhaps you had other postulations?

In 2012 you made yet another choice. In *Disabled Theater*, you worked with the mentally disabled actors from Zurich's Theater *HORA*. The on-stage potential of these actors not only involved the social and political, but also the aesthetic. Some people praised this work for its outstanding exploration of presence and representation; others have criticized it as a freak show. Martin Creed said that the point is that everyone is disabled in the sense that we're all struggling with our own difficulties, and that everyone expresses themselves in the way that they move. Is that what you were thinking of? Besides, I guess, there is no way of looking away from the peculiar. It seems that your work is not so much about a laid-back moment of entertainment, but to invite the spectator to re-invent herself and to research her ideology of watching. How do you feel about representation and identification? And what does "otherness" mean for dance and theatre?

Thank you so much  
for everything  
Marie

Hello Marie,

If you are talking about *Gala*; it started when I gave free workshops for amateurs in Saint-Denis. Then I had the idea of making a 'professional' show with them, because I was fascinated by their energy and their freedom. They have a very different attitude from professionals towards dance; they just don't care, they simply want to enjoy it, and I thought that was absolutely awesome.<sup>54</sup> What has always interested me about amateurs is their fragility, the fact that unlike professionals, who become masters of their respective art forms, amateurs are defenseless. Amateur practice is based on the principle of pleasure, of desire. Every amateur is in the process of becoming and will never become as accomplished

as a professional.<sup>55</sup>

In the case of Theater *HORA*'s actors, the most interesting thing was the way they performed and how in this way they extended the field of theatre and dance. And enriched it. They brought us new experiences because they have qualities that we no longer allow ourselves. They don't try to be anything, they are. Their vitality and joy, their relationship to their own body and those of the others is so fundamental and direct that intellectuals are simply amazed. In '*Disabled Theater*' everyone is who he or she is. As in all my works, I want to go beyond representation – nothing is 're-presented'<sup>56</sup>

What also fascinated me about these people, was their way of not incorporating some of theatre's rules. Indeed, I've worked a lot myself on deconstructing these prescriptive conventions. Given their cognitive distortions, these actors had not incorporated some of these conventions. It was an extremely interesting situation for me, because in a way their theatre is freer than that of standard performers. Their freedoms reveal theatrical possibilities that I didn't know existed.<sup>57</sup> For me theatre is about being able to see what you're not used to seeing, what's hidden and concealed from view.

You talk about authenticity. I would call it uniqueness, this inalienable subjectivity of the human being dancing.

The individuation of performers is another research field. It's impossible for me not to use that. The performer is the heart of my theatre: he or she must appear on stage as an artist, worker, citizen, subject and individual in his or her most absolute uniqueness. It's this uniqueness that can reveal to me just what theatre is capable of. Disabled (or incapable!) actors open up new possibilities, new powers!<sup>58</sup>

This "otherness" is a total enrichment for every dancer and choreographer. The performers of Hora teach us to accept differences. This is something that concerns us all. For society they are the minority of a minority – virtually 'foreign bodies.' And they are actually different – their bodies, their faces, their movements. And what do you do in the theatre? You pay to look. The essence of the theatre is to see something different from yourself. Our performers, however, seem to be so very strange that it's a challenge for the audience to keep on looking at them. We are brought up to avert our eyes from whatever seems different, strange, deformed, or disfigured. But I force the viewers not to avert their gaze so that they become aware of themselves as observers. As a member of the audience, I normally identify with the performer onstage. In *Disabled Theater* there is some confusion, particularly at the beginning, because viewers do not want to identify themselves. They certainly don't want to be disabled. Then, gradually, the performers reveal something to us that is also within ourselves. This touches us, and we realize that we are also often disabled in life.<sup>59</sup> So yes, I agree with Martin Creed.

Veraciously,  
Jérôme

Dear Jérôme,

I guess that the visual impact is decisive for the perception of otherness. It is specifically this visibility that makes us want to watch people. I guess that few are aware of our property of being a spectator. In your work, you literally shine a light on the other. The performer has some desire to go on stage, to be seen, to be wanted, which of course is different from when I watch a woman waiting at the bus stop. But then again, I probably wouldn't be very engaged with this woman, other than that I have a curiosity for how she moves and behaves, what she looks like and how I interpretate this. Or, when I am a creative person, what story I make out of it. It's a one-way event. She isn't performing, because she didn't choose to be part of an artistic act. Unless something dramatic happened, she got under the bus, for example, I probably won't be very empathetic to her, even though I am watching.

What is empathy to you?

Sincerely,  
Marie



Dear Marie,

Here's a grandiose statement: art serves to teach us what an emotion is. Thus, if, as a spectator, I feel moved—which doesn't necessarily happen—I need to understand why. Emotion is a reaction which replaces language when it is no longer operative, one feels moved because one doesn't know what to say or what to think. We feel something, but we don't know what. It's unsayable, ineffable. I have no interest in the kind of art that only produces emotions, I like art which also enables me to understand why I feel moved, what it conceals and what I am unable to conceive.

Emotion reveals the existence of the spectator. Emotion—which is characterized by a state of disquiet that thought is unable to master—emerges when the spectator recognizes some element of his/her reality in the performance. This troubled or disquieted state sometimes overwhelms me sometimes when I'm watching a performance.

At the theatre, there are the actors, and the other spectators. I don't know if you know these words by Beckett in *The Unnamable*: "That's the show, waiting alone, in the restless air, for it to begin, for something to begin, for there to be something else but you."

This emotion proceeds from empathy, allowing the spectator to feel what's taking place on the stage: it's part of me. As a spectator, I too occasionally share in the experience of what's being staged, but thanks to the staging, the representation, thanks to the otherness that all works of art produce, thanks, furthermore, to the apparatus of the theatre, I'm able to step back and gain perspective— "it's only theatre," "it's all make-believe". Although I identify with it— 'it's part of me'—I can objectify my disquiet in order to understand it.

I always think that what's really interesting, is the distance between things. What I love doing in my shows is enabling the spectators to perform this movement, to go from distance to proximity, from denial to identification, from otherness to empathy, from representation to reality, and vice versa. That's my reading of Aristotelian and Brechtian theory! What I try to choreograph is, precisely, this mental movement, to enable the spectator to understand why he/she suddenly feels stirred.<sup>60</sup>

I don't 'think about emotion' either, but I have to acknowledge that some of my works do produce emotions, in an unintended way. The emotion my shows have produced—ever since *The Show Must Go On*—operates through the spectator's empathy with the actors, it doesn't arise when they dance, but when they have stopped dancing, and are often exhausted, or when they have just divulged something about their lives and then remain silent. It's the point when he/she is breathless, when they think about what they have just said, when they have stopped doing the acting or dance work, when they have stopped performing and have nothing else to do, when one can perceive their solitude, their reality, when they manage to get back to themselves and not to their social function, i.e., a dancer. I mean when they are no longer communicating (that's what I mean by solitude: when you communicate you are not alone). At these points, the spectator has to go and 'get them' because the actor (who is no longer an actor) is elusive, or at least he/she is no longer reaching out to the spectator.

Yes yes!

Jérôme



# The third thing

Performer.

Audience.

And then there is the third thing: the power field that is formed by the artwork itself.

The term is thought of by Rancière, 'the autonomous third thing': the work or performance itself, that subsists between 'the work' and spectator autonomously, in this space where the performer and spectator meet.

According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze making an event – however small – is the most delicate thing in the world. It is the opposite of making history. It is a moment of pure singularity, belonging to another dimension. Such a moment only exists for a short time, singularly. Like each breath, like oxygen.

Water is H<sub>2</sub>O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one, but there is also a third thing, that makes it water and nobody knows what it is. The atom locks up two energies but it is a third thing present which makes it an atom.

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# In the end the first movement

It all starts with breathing.

It is the slightest form of movement. The most vital as well. Seemingly a banal act of taking air into the lungs and releasing it, breathing connects bodies to other bodies and to the atmosphere. Every body breathes. And the beauty of it, is that we do this movement unconsciously. In this action, we reach ultimate neutrality. Until we start paying attention to it. When we start to perform breathing.

Then comes seeing. Or watching. Seeing is not just ocular. It is a sensorial way of being in the world. It is another way of breathing. Watery sometimes, tears may get in the way. Seeing is our gateway to experience. In choreography we can see gestures phenomenologically reproducing life: walking, running, standing still, turning your head, raising a finger, or simply breathing.

We perceive everything around us with our body. There is nothing but the body and what it inhabits. It is our limitation, and it is everything, the whole universe. Our corporeality is what we can feel, it is carnal, primordial. It becomes material that we can mold, that we can interact with, and thus connect ourselves with the environment, the space, with things. Physicality is not technique. It is about experiencing the body, about feeling that you have a body. By getting out of our heads, we get into the body.

All bodies exist not only in space, but also in time. They continue, and, at any moment of their continuance, may assume a different appearance and stand in different relations. The transience of our bodies is about the

fragility of our form, the story of life and death, its beauty and its inevitability. The finiteness of our bodies is interesting in its insurmountability: that they cease to exist, the decay.

It all ends with breathing. It is the last movement we ever make.

So, it is not just about watching

It is about breathing

And being silent together



# Footnotes

1. I have sent this letter to Wim by email. He has read and approved it.
2. 80 cm away from you, voorstellingen/performances 2002 – 2009, Dries Verhoeven (2009) p 66-67
3. Hélio Oiticica, Dance in My Experience (Diary Entries)//1965-66 From: Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art, 2006, edited by Claire Bishop p.105
4. De man die zijn sjaal opat, Het Utrechts Profiel, uitgave van Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht Faculteit Theater, Januari 2005, Lex Berger and Tjeerd Maas P.58
5. From an interview with Laurent Chétouane, French director and representative of puristic works of theatre with a strong focus on language. BRON GOETHE <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/tut/gen/tan/20364054.html>
6. The piano teacher by Elfriede Jelinek, De pianist, vertaald naar het Nederlands door Tinke Davids, 1987, Uitgeverij Van Gennepe bv, Amsterdam. p.58-61 Translated to English by ML. This book was first published in 1983. The discussion about gender pronouns goes back to the fourteenth century Middle English pronoun, singular 'ou'. It has become an important topic in the last decade, but the 'it' in this text refers to the objectification of the (female) body. In 2001, the novel The Piano Teacher was adapted into a film by Michael Haneke and awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize in Literature.
7. The emancipated spectator, Jacques Rancière, 2008 Verso, London New York, p.16-17
8. The letters from Martin Creed are composed from several sources. They are the artists words.
9. Interview. Life Lessons with the Inimitable. <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8725/life-lessons-with-the-inimitable-martin-creed>
10. Interview. Life Lessons with the Inimitable. <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8725/life-lessons-with-the-inimitable-martin-creed>
11. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3mHfdfWNNW77D15zx3QdCHJ/paint-lights-action-how-artist-martin-creed-went-crazy-in-the-country>
12. Work No.2692 is a big painting made with a lot of people in Zurich in 2015
13. Interview. Life Lessons with the Inimitable. <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/8725/life-lessons-with-the-inimitable-martin-creed>
14. Work No. 850 consists of runners dodging visitors as they sprint through the gallery as fast as they can. It happens every thirty seconds, jolting this normally serene space for an instant.
15. Work No.503, 2006, 35mm film, color, sound, 1 minute 6 seconds
16. Bertolt Brecht in an interview with Bernard Guillemin, Die Literarische Welt, Berlin, 30 July 1926, in Brecht on Theatre, the development of an aesthetic, 1964, John Willett, Hill and Wang, New York
17. Work no. 1701, 2013, video, 4 minutes 15 seconds
18. Martin Creed's Work No. 850, TateShots, Sep 3, 2008 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U8FI45-DFw>
19. In Your Face: Interview: Martin Creed by Carrie Scott Dec 7, 2014 for SHOWstudio <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY3L0cNqDiw>
20. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3mHfdfWNNW77D15zx3QdCHJ/paint-lights-action-how-artist-martin-creed-went-crazy-in-the-country>
21. Playing a musical instrument is, due to the use of the instrument, a different story. I disregard this performative art here, because I am discussing the human body as an instrument.
22. (introduction [http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/part2\\_home.htm](http://pwatkins.mnsi.net/part2_home.htm))
23. idem
24. Roy Andersson <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/aug/28/roy-andersson-pigeon-sat-branch-reflecting-existence>
25. Artificial Hells, Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship, Claire Bishop 2012. Verso London NY, p.29
26. Peggy Phelan in Unmarked the politics of performance Routledge Ed.
27. Merce Cunningham, who danced in the performance. <https://www.mercecunningham.org/the-work/choreography/theatre-piece-1952/>
28. Allan Kaprow, Assemblages, Environments and Happenings (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966) p198
29. Allan Kaprow, Notes on the Elimination of the audience 1966 (Participation, edited by Claire Bishop)

30. Judson Dance Theater grew out of a composition class held at Merce Cunningham's studio, taught by Robert Dunn, a musician who had studied experimental music theory with John Cage. A Concert of Dance, the first Judson concert, took place on July 6, 1962, and included the work of 14 choreographers performed by 17 people, some of whom were students in the Dunn composition class. Other performers in the concert were members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, as well as visual artists, filmmakers, and composers.
31. <https://movementresearch.org/publications/critical-correspondence/mrpj-14-the-legacy-of-robert-ellis-dunn-1928-1996-in-the-congregation-of-art-by-al-carmines-reprinted-from-dance-scope-fall-winter-1967-68>
32. Relational Aesthetics, Nicolas Bourriaud, 1998, Les presses du reel, p.13
33. Rosalind Krauss, "The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum," October 54 (Autumn 1990)
34. From 1968 to 1988, Jacques Lecoq was a teacher at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts where he developed a teaching programme on architecture based on the human body, movement and the "dynamics of mime". In 1977 he founded the stage design department of the school, known as LEM (Laboratoire d'étude du mouvement — movement research laboratory). The école Internationale de théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris offers a two-year training program that studies improvisation and its rules, movement technique and its analysis.
35. The Dutch word 'motoriek', which means 'the ability to move', translates as 'mobility'. Unfortunately, I can't find a word that describes what I mean: the way you move, the possibilities of the musculoskeletal system of every individual body.
36. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3mHfdfWNNW77D15zx3QdCHJ/paint-lights-action-how-artist-martin-creed-went-crazy-in-the-country>
37. The letters are composed from several sources. They are the artists words.
- Italian artist Romeo Castellucci graduated in painting and scenography from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. In 1981, he founded Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Since then, Castellucci has produced numerous plays and has become known as one of the most fascinating contemporary theatre directors, whose work is characterized by aesthetical radicalism and profound humanity. While inspired by classics of Western culture (works by Aeschylus, Dante and Shakespeare), the theatre that he produces follows the performance philosophy of Antonin Artaud where, much more than the text, bodies – often atypical – concentrate and condense meaning in a stage context of thunderous soundtracks and intense imagery. High tech is combined with the age-old crafts of dramatic art to create worlds that transpose reality through a series of diffractions. Spectacular by nature, Castellucci's theatre questions the world we live in from an essentially humanist point of view.
38. Interview Esther Severini, 30-09-20120 De Singel Antwerp.
39. Interview Esther Severini, 30-09-20120 De Singel Antwerp.
40. <https://chekhovfest.ru/en/festival/projects/performances/j-project-on-the-concept-of-the-face-regarding-the-son-of-god/>
41. Kunstenfestivaldesart 2021 Conversation curated by Piersandra Di Matteo and translated by Brent Waterhouse <https://kfa.be/en/festivals/2021-edition/projects/buster/>
42. Interview de Romeo Castellucci, conduite par Thomas Crombez et Wouter Hillaert Cesena, Teatro Comandini (Via Serraglio 22) 19 déc. 2004 p.301-302 Translated from French
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