

***Slow Dance* – undermining graspability in a molecular environment**

Slow Dance is a choreographic project that consists of four parts, where each part proposes a slow experience inside its respective context: The Theatre, The Museum, The Garden and The Church. Erdman and Dahl also coin ‘slow dance’ a gathering term for dance practices that resonate with a wider slow art movement: a movement that calls attention to the experience of time unfolding, where watching becomes both conscious and embodied.

Like slow food, slow cinema, slow sex and many other slow movements and genres, slow dance emerges in reaction to a contemporary context where most areas of life go (too) fast. Yet more than strictly opposing *speed*, slowness emerges here to offer an interlude from an everyday climate of *haste*. Where, driven by neoliberal and capitalist logics of competition, today’s hasteful time-regime goes with a tendency towards domination and destructive races for individualistic as well as anthropocentric self-fulfilment, slowness can allow things to be done at their own pace, to exist in their own space of radiance, and encourages reciprocal relations to one’s environment.

The slow pace of movement in *Slow Dance* creates a sense of duration that, by bringing attention to a molecular realm of existence below the personhood of dancers and spectators alike, below movement as action and below graspability, allows to question not only the time-regime that reigns in contemporary society, but also the work-logic, instrumental rationality and craving for personal self-fulfilment that go with it.

Echoing a tendency in European choreography to challenge what Bojana Cvejic identified as “the body-movement bind” in *Choreographing Problems* (2015), *Slow Dance* unhooks dance from its common understanding as a sequence of movements effectuated by a body.ⁱ Slowed down to a sensitive point where we lose track of where in space and time a movement came from and where it is going towards, movement is disidentified from its common understanding as a displacement from A to B in space and time, and the dance as a sequence of such movements disappears. Isolated from its causes and purposes in choreographic pasts and futures, it seems to unfold at a level below action, utility, efficiency or (however abstract) causal unfolding. Rather than movements that can be organized into a choreography, the viewer tends to see bodies in movement *simply being there*, almost like one would look at a visual artwork.

The slow pace of moving makes not only the dance but even the dancers retreat to the background of a viewer’s mind. The common spectatorial attitude to admire dancers on stage as very skilled or beautiful persons is undermined. As if driven by the advocacy André Lepecki expresses in *Singularities* (2016) to experiment with planes of existence beyond the boundaries of contemporary personhood, and his conviction that “the person is not to be conceived of as the only form within which life is destined to flow”, Erdman and Dahl strip away the personalities of the dancers by calling attention to a molecular plane that precedes human-modeled identification.ⁱⁱ In a narcissistic culture that grants a toxically disproportionate importance to the individual person, they look for a collective space of more detailed experience.

As the slow pace of movement undermines the identification of actions, displacements, achievements and individual persons, attention is less attracted to persons and movements that can be de-coded, understood or even simply assimilated to our organized reality than to an infinitely rich molecular materiality that escapes full grasp and is simply there: an ontological level below instrumental relations of dancers as subjects and movements as objects that serve the choreographic utility of creating this or that form, this or that pattern. Rather than in a split second identifying Louise-the-dancer, a purple blouse and a trajectory towards x, one is granted the time to notice weight shifting slowly from one hip to another, sitting bones moving in a very specific way, lights reflecting on the fabric of a blouse that on a specific moment shows interesting shades and folds because of the tiny movements of the dancer; to sense the tension that is created by two bodies coming closer to one another; to observe a body with its very proportions, micromovements and texture of skin; or let one’s eyes rest on the artwork that has been printed on the dancefloor.

Together with light, sound and scenography, the slow movement quality and state of the dancers create a slow atmosphere that imbues the whole space and affects everyone and everything in it.ⁱⁱⁱ This atmosphere is calm, soothing, dreamy and at the same time vibrant. It reaches out, radiates. By at the

same time calming and demanding attention while giving little “matter” for the viewer’s monkey minds to put their grasp on, chew on, analyze, decode or logically follow, this atmosphere encourages a shift in one’s relation to our environment from action to sensorial reception and perception. It offers time and space to release the tension that tends to accompany everyday life and to simply marvel at bodies, clothes, lights and sound being in movement.

Like Pauline Oliveros’ practice of Deep Listening, *Slow Dance* offers a space for “deep perception”. It invites to “listen” with all senses to sensorial impulses without identifying them. Because there is no narrative to follow, nor any message to “get”, one can suspend her compulsive tendency to grasp and analyze, and instead allow a state of contemplative lingering to take over where attention can aimlessly roam around.

As a “semantically underdetermined environment”, to use the words of Ana Vujanović who has accompanied this project as a dramaturge, the wide, open and slow atmosphere of *Slow Dance* is challenging for viewers accustomed to a hyperactive and overstimulated culture. In the absence of indications of where to look, or how to approach what we perceive, attention naturally fluctuates between distraction, impatience, boredom and contemplative looking.^{iv} Usual ways of directing attention are challenged, and each one is given the responsibility of allowing the piece to speak back to her.

Collaboratively choreographed by Dahl and Erdman, *Slow Dance* resonates with a recent wave of interest for more horizontal and less hierarchic ways of organizing ourselves on mental, social, affective, political and even environmental levels. By inviting to attune to a molecular, pre-individual plane where divisions between subjects and objects, performers, viewers and semantic units simply don’t exist, this piece experiments with alternative ways of engaging with our environment – collectively as well as individually. Cvejic associates the desubjectivation and disobjectivation in works that like *Slow Dance* challenge a body-movement bind, to “postidentitarian and posthumanist perspectives on the body and movement”.^v As viewers, we cannot enter this plane without being absorbed by it ourselves. Like the dance and the dancers, our individual and human selves that are able to act on reality float to the background – at least, if we allow it. What remains are fluxes of sensation.

– By Alice Van der Wielen-Honinckx

ⁱ Cvejic elaborates her views on the body-movement bind in *Choreographing Problems* pages 17-22.

ⁱⁱ André Lepecki formulates this advocacy in *Singularities*, pages 11, 36-37, 84.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the German philosopher Gernot Böhme, atmospheres have a vague ontological status, somewhere between objective and subjective reality. They can be generated by objective reality, and they affect subjects in a bodily-sensuous way. He describes this in his article “The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres” (2013).

^{iv} I condense ideas that Ana Vujanović develops in her two articles on ‘landscape dramaturgy’: “Landscape Dramaturgy: Space after Perspective” (2018) and “Meandering Together: New Problems in Landscape Dramaturgy” (2019).

^v *Choreographing Problems* page 22.