

exposition corps: interview

with Saskia Hölbling

by Gilles Amalvi for the Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine-Saint-Denis

What did you want to exhibit by way of and through the body?

What is important is what happens on the stage, but it requires a certain distance to “exhibit” what takes place there: in order for the stage to exist as a place for exhibitions, the public must be able to perceive that an outside exists. Actually I occupy myself in essence with the internal body, the body’s memory, which I understand to be an autonomous existence. What is important here is that it’s not about memories. Memories are more connected to a subjective experience and have components of psychological meanings. I am interested in the body’s ontological knowledge. I’ve looked for a means to set free the buried memory in us. After the finding of these forms – crystallised by long improvisational work, I tried to a large extent to reduce those forms that “said too much”.

How is it different from your last piece “other feature” which already explored the subjectivity of the body?

In “other feature” there were several of us and we were naked. This time underwear introduces a human aspect: you see it is a human body, even if this body does not keep to the usual societal codes. It’s in a state of imbalance. “other feature” showed the subjectivity of a body, in which the face, the gestures were abstracted to enable an unimpaired view of the matter, this amorphous, organic mass. In this piece I wondered how we could include a face and gestures without getting into the area of interpretation. It should be impossible to say, “Now she is happy, this gesture has that meaning ...

How did you work with the music?

All movement studies occur in silence. The whole development happened in silence. Then I spoke to Heinz Ditsch, who makes the music. He looked at what I had done, put together a sampler, then we rehearsed together. The music shouldn’t cover up, shouldn’t create a certain atmosphere. The constraint for this piece was to find tones, that have no connotations, that don’t lead to interpretation. That is very difficult, because the world of sounds is very concrete. The music should not replace the gestures in a certain context. All this, finally, has to make up an entire composition of music, light and dance, that shuts itself off to interpretation.

The technique, the learning process are part of this body-memory. How do you carry out the preparation?

Since P.A.R.T.S I have shaped the training myself. I try to avoid formulas and movements, instead I try to work on the material. I don’t look for forms in space, but more on the inside: I dismantle layers and the body finds micro-movements, which it takes along as a whole. It is internal work based on the image of the skeleton. I am interested in the tension between the muscles, the bones, the joints. Training enables me to go into detail. I don’t train the body with regard to an outer image, but I start out from the body itself.

In the prose poem "Extraits du Corps" (body extracts) by the poet Bernard Noël, it says, “No gesture is thinkable. ... Emptiness. Emptiness. ... But the traces? Where are the traces? All this unknown cannot constantly slobber in me without leaving a trace (...) From whom? From where? What am I and the other and the other?” What do you think of that?

Emptiness is a paradox. In order for that presence to be able to surface, we have to empty ourselves completely. Then, as soon as the emptiness sets in, all other layers and traces may come back. “No gesture is thinkable”: in my work the body frees itself to let things out as soon as the mind has emptied itself. Everything that has taken place around us, leaves traces even if we aren’t aware of them.

On the other hand the question of the self and of the other is very important since there is no longer a definable ego, but only a relationship with the other, which is forming. All the traces that are registered in our body are there because there is an “other” and there are “surroundings”. We are in dialogue with the world. When I make my presence felt on the stage, I let these states appear, knowing an encounter between myself and the public will take place. So I see myself as a projection surface. I set my memory free, but the piece is created from the connection with the memory of the other. It takes place in the middle, between me and the other. We could say that about any performance, but here there is no specified direction, there are no narrative or theatrical effects. The concentration on the body itself implies another relationship to the audience, to the stage, to the other.