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Introduction

Between 2005 and 2008 I created two thematically linked yet distinct choreographic works *DdumY another myself* and *'The making of Doubt'*. In these works the subjective experience of banal objects and spaces became a starting point through which to translate an approach to dance and performance making. The following text is a narrative on that choreographic process.

dDumY another myself

On the subject of the 'desire body' the Sufi poet Rumi writes *'All moving is from the mover' (1)* but whom or what can be considered a 'mover'?

In everyday life freedom of movement is organized around rather than through obstacles as we orientate our movement in relation to a constantly shifting constellation of spaces, objects and bodies, traversing the spaces in-between and around networks of hallways, rooms, streets and corridors. Might we not therefore consider objects and architecture also as 'movers' or agents of movement? And from the point of view of this inanimate gesturing perceive all seemingly static things as being to some extent in motion?

The chair's posture invites the body to sit. The static figure in *dDumY another myself* is the starting point from which to consider how to make a movement. In performance this first movement can be understood in terms of a beginning and presents itself as the gesture of collapse. Moving the body from a vertical to horizontal position, suggesting a puppet like body this both passive and resistive gesture denotes the moment of passage from human to bodily object. The mass-produced chair and tables originally used in this performance, designs now largely obsolete, came from a community space in Glasgow and exemplify an experience of minimal comfort and functional architecture for all. Working with the qualities of this space and furniture led my investigation into the nature of this context.

'Kinning park complex' where the performance was first developed is an example of the politics of action with regard to the ownership of public space. Kinning park complex was once a local authority primary school building now reinvented as a community centre located in Govan a marginal area of the city close to the once thriving hub of Glasgow's ship building industry on the River Clyde. The building came under threat of closure from the city council until local people staged a 'sit-in' demonstration during a period of 52 days to ensure the spaces survival. The building was bought off the council for a symbolic rent of £1 a year. The space is a social project used and given free of charge or by donation by all who need it within the community including a number of artist groups, a kindergarten and peace workers. Helen Kyle the organizer of this space is a community activist working for the rights of the disenfranchised within Govan.

To the viewer standing facing north, the main hall at Kinning Park Complex is an empty rectangle offering an open field for spatial pathways to be described. It seems more space than a body requires. In delineating the performance area I measured a taped floor area of 9 x 9 metres squared then sub-divided this floor space into two levels by making a platform out of long tables at one end. By positioning the imaginary viewer as a seated figure facing the tables this organization of space can be considered a screen in so far as it flattens the space around a frontal perspective common to churches or traditional theatre. Reducing the space in a minimal setting of props of the most banal nature the illusion of performance is liminal in that these objects represent the real world organized around an idea of flatness.

Picking up from performance works such as Beckett's '*Quad*' these tables and taped square are both a map and rules around which the performer must *perambulate* (survey the boundaries) in a clockwise direction. The rule of this floor area is that the performance is only completed when the performer has made one complete 'turn' or circuit within its total circumference.

Subverting or playing with this rule creates encounters with the objects and disorientated movements in space around the directions forward, back, right and left as suggested by the taped square.

The dancers body in *dDumY another myself* is understood as an organization of lines in space. The first choreographic ideas were developed as line drawings taking the figure of a body pushing a pram and reproducing it as an encounter between a dancer and a chair. The choreography mimics how the pram frame extends the arm through a diagonal line to produce a triangular shape between chair and body to create a total anatomy or 'skeleton'.

The choreography sees the body as if through a camera lens, morphing slow moving angular forms around the geometric possibilities of this 'chair body'. The forms of 'chair body' are collapsed, expanded, rotated and re-positioned in space in order to present an image of shifting perspectives to the seated spectator as if s/he were moving around and above it.

Elevating the body on the plinth of tables places it within the frame of sculptural depiction, slowness acting both as a perceptual field and as a means to capture movement in almost impossible anti-gravitational terms.

Taking the parameters of the everyday and interacting with the banal minimum to the maximum, chair and table becoming vehicles through which to subvert meaning, utility and function. A mimetic relationship between chair and body allows the body to assume the deathly and androgynous quality of the object, in turn the chair through this interaction appears at moments weightless. It was important in this movement with the chair that the head and face remained hidden from the viewer. This now hybrid body can no longer be identified as only 'dancer' or 'chair' and as such questions the representation of both. The dancer without a face is as the dummy, an anonymous 'anybody' as oppose to a particular 'somebody'.

The body's visible outline is defined by space. The body is a solid, skin the threshold between inner and outer, the face an open surface through the holes of eyes and mouth. While working with the furniture I become aware of how it is possible to physically translate their absence as a spatial idea. Solid absence or the 'space object' can be described and moved in terms of a negative space by thinking simultaneously about where the body is and is not within any moving form. If the dancer both understands space as an active force against the body and also as a volume that is created between one body part and another or one body and another, it is perhaps possible to make the movement of space as tangible for the spectator as body image. This may however be an impossible reversal in real time and space, as we commonly perceive the figure only in positive terms as Bauhaus artist Paul Klee writes in his Pedagogical Sketchbook *on the formation of the black arrow*

'This arrow forms when a given or adequate, or actual white receives intensified energies from additive, acting, or futural black. Why not the other way around? Answer: the stress lies on rare speciality as against broad generality. The latter affects us as competently static and customary; the first one as unusual, activating. And the arrow always flies in the direction of action...' (2)

The dynamic forces of gravity acting on the skeleton inform verticality. Human walking is a vertical movement that normally orientates the body forward in relation to the direction of the eyes. Where and how we choose to focus outside of the body informing how we orientate ourselves in space. Losing the dominance of this projected direction as a point of reference heightens a different kind of awareness with regard to kinesthetic sense. Extending the notion of spatial orientation in developing a concept that would produce the mechanics of walking differently, I divided the body vertically down the middle to rewire coordination around symmetry rather than natural opposition. Dividing the experience of right and left limbs, joints, extremities and surfaces including the head as an extension of the spine or fifth limb, the mechanics of making asymmetrical and symmetrical physical connections produce syncopated rhythms when put into coordinated and uncoordinated relationships in four, three and two legged movement patterns.

The dancer improvises around the principles of a constant accumulative movement sequence using symmetry and opposition to connect, collapse or dissolve connected 'points' whilst placing, displacing, rotating and bending limbs in space. Within these rules the dancer is situated within a constant search to both co-ordinate and orientate movement. The head as an extension of the spine does not focus on a fixed point as rhythmic head and torso movements decentralizes the body's centre of gravity moving in-between horizontal and vertical planes as it experiences space through the complexity of directions suggested by turning in, out and around its kinesphere without any attempt to externally fix the gaze.

The making of Doubt

'The making of Doubt' is a dance performance for human and doll performers. This performance started out as a series of photographs confusing the identity of humans and dolls taken in an abandoned clothing factory. Antoin Artaud writes in 'The theatre and its double' *'The mind believes what it sees and does what it believes; that is the secret of fascination'* (3) The 'making' in *'The making of doubt'* refers to the process of perception that bypasses rational intellect in a desire to believe in the reality of the doll. The factory where this performance originated is located in Glasgow's Merchant City, once second city of the British Empire the Merchant City area of Glasgow is architecturally delineated by its Victorian and Industrial past. The abandoned factory like the puppet is an empty and unproductive body, it serves no purpose. The photographer Jeff Wall writes the following on Baroque painting and culture within a text on his photograph *'mimic'*

'Those bodies were not bound to machines, or replaced by them in the division of labour, and were not afraid of them. From our point of view therefore they express happiness even when they suffer. The ceremoniousness, the energy, and the sensuousness of the gestures of Baroque art are replaced in modernity by mechanistic movements, reflex actions, involuntary, compulsive responses, these actions are not really gestures in the sense developed by older aesthetics.' (4)

The puppet body like those baroque bodies mentioned by wall knows no labour or pain, it cannot take action only gesture. The dolls animated gesture when thrown in the air is uncontrollable; the human gesture in its imitation is expansive and exaggerated. As performance replaces labour in the factory space, the human performers are moved in state of desired action. Antoin Artuad writes in 'The theatre and its double' *'Theatre, that is to say that momentarily pointlessness which drives them to useless acts without immediate profit'* (5). The action with the dolls in *The Making of Doubt* is executed with the speed of efficiency to no logical end. The humans and dolls group and regroup creating spatial pathways and momentary stops around the logic of walking patterns and changing positions to confuse their interchangeable identities. The use of peripheral vision as a means to 'see' everything and everyone at the same time informs this unison movement. The moments of 'stop' are images of arrested motion and as such are an attempt to prolong or suspend the image of movement. The performers and doll performers are dressed in similar clothing and are hooded in order to all appear anonymously 'human'. They construct pictures that expand and contract the spatial distribution between them. These pictures involve creating the choreographic architecture of body pile-ups and human walls as a way to integrate and suspend the fiction of the doll.

The human figure possesses anthropomorphic form. It cannot explode or dissolve this form at will unlike a superhero or the magical Indian Gods in the mythical Indian creation story the *Ramayana* who could transform themselves instantaneously into a variety of human and animal forms. Therefore in performance costume or disguise becomes a way to dematerialize the body and subvert the geometry of the human figure. In *Remembering the Body* Gerald Sigmund writes in the chapter entitled 'Bending towards the Breaking Point: The deformation of Dance and mannerist Images of the body'

The Bauhaus exponent Oskar Schlemmer does not take the body as his starting point "in order to slowly sculpt dance out of it" but instead starts "from the form, from a formative idea" exploring his approach to modernism with his sculptural costumes. (6)

In *The making of Doubt* puppet limbs or quasi prosthetics are attached to the dancers bodies and then costumed with everyday clothing. The additional limb 'irritates' the perception of both real and fake members. Like the doll the prosthetic is only successful in so far as it reproduces naturalism. These bodies produce unusual and confusing body geometries as an arm sprouts from the chest or a leg from the spinal chord. What spaces would such a body inhabit? In performance dance positions that have a classical use of geometric proportion and balance are subverted with the use of the prosthesis to produce impossible images of asymmetry and flying bodies.

Replacing the performer with a non-representational image sees a total covering or disguising of human form. In *'The making of Doubt'* two rectangular cardboard 'performers' operated by real performers 'dance' in space. The vocabulary of movement dictated by the materiality and rectangular surface of the cardboards that fold, bend, swivel, invert, jump and come together and apart to produce geometrical couplings. Drawing on inspiration from early modernist performer Loie Fuller other experiments with dissolving anthropomorphic form sees covering the body in a cloth 'bag' in an attempt to collapse linear geometries and produce amorphous shape. This body has a liquid quality and with no centre, it cannot inhabit or become stable in space.

Glossary of quotations

1. Rumi 'Selected poems' Pg 54 Published by Penguin classics 1995
2. Paul Klee Pedagogical sketchbook introduction and translation by Moholy-Nagy P g 57 '40 formation of the black arrow.' Published by Faber and Faber Ltd first published by Bauhaus books in 1925
3. Antoin Artuad 'The theatre and its double' Pg 18 Calder publications 1949 New Paris Editions.
4. Jeff Wall Artists monograph published by Phaidon, 1996
5. Antoin Artuad 'The theatre and its double' Pg 15 Calder publications 1949 New Paris Editions.
6. ReMembering the body Pg 160 Published by Hatje Cantz publications 2000