

## **Working worlds between bodies**

by Joseph Barker

WOWOWOW, a new piece by Fanclub and Quim Bigas, attempts to work through, in real time, Jerome Bel's idea of liberating dance from choreography. However, what we have here is not the liberation of individuals and their all-too-personal feelings. Instead, there is a much more difficult liberation: the liberation of collective movements, passing between bodies without conceptual control or domination.

### **Emancipating the Gesture from the Personal**

In the work of Jerome Bel, each performer tends to possess their own movement: flicking a penis, pointing a finger. Each different movement and 'character' is quite separate with their own choice of clothing brand, gesture, voice, favourite song and inner feelings. When bodies come together to sing, they do so as a unity of separate selves, perhaps isolated by headphones.

In WOWOWOW, on the other hand, gestures from classical ballet, experiences of madness and club culture migrate across and through bodies, without rigid laws, in a constant re-negotiation. In this profusion of movement across dancing bodies, the 'personal' cannot impose itself as a dominant concept, neither can any choreographic command or governing external concept.

### **Blurred Individuality across Generative Movements**

The setting neither radically separates the stage from the spectators, nor does it absolutely merge the two (*a la* Interactive Theater). Instead, there is a rectangular border following the layout of the old church. Along this border sit wooden church pews, with permeable spaces in which the dancers constantly break the line. This borderline is not a marker of exclusion but a welcoming threshold: a bucket is placed on a lap by a dancer; laughter passes between witnesses and performers. The rigidity of 'inside' and 'outside,' so dear to Nations, Institutions and Selves, is made permeable and variable here.

The piece opens when a dancer passes through the borderline without any formal signal of a beginning: no lights dim, no announcement is made, no striking postures are made. The events emerge gradually, as other performers walk in and the bodies and lights begin their various ambiguous movements: warm-ups morph slowly into beautiful, classical poses. It is unclear where a repeated movement begins or ends, or who has decided on what gestures should be included. Movement and gesture emerge from the relations *between these* bodies in *this* space in *this* time, as opposed to following the blueprint laid out by a great choreographic mind.

## **The Ungovernable Street raised to the Stage**

At one point, a woman and man gyrate with a machinic eroticism, legs spread towards one another, while, in the foreground, a *port de bras* is proficiently achieved. This repetition of sexual and formal gestures, transposed from the street and the stage, reveals the heart of the piece. A series of forms emerge, torn from their origins but retaining their power, which is magnified by being brought into unforeseen relations with other fragmented gestures. These repetitions of history and life - ballet, sex, labour, laughter - are themselves thrown from one body to the next, in a game where the rules seem to unfold with the play.

In Bel's *The Show Must Go On*, a woman, dressed in a shirt from a high-street brand and typical blue jeans, sways in her own singular way. The individual is here, but trapped in the individuality provided, ironically, by non-individual consumer capitalism and financially motivated culture. In *WOWOWOW*, no individual has a monopoly on any movement. Those movements are drawn from the unconscious structures of gesture that span the social field: spinning, ballet, nightclubs, street dance, childlike postures, madness, depression, sex, animality. These are the movements that make us, and we see ourselves, on the stage, in the process of being made.

## **Elevating Pop Words and Communal Sounds**

Statements beginning with "I believe" tend to reflect the deepest dimensions of what makes each person their own 'self.' In *WOWOWOW*, we hear, for example, "I believe that a certain distance is required for intimacy." However, this statement returns, later, repeated by another performer, given a completely new resonance. This repetition mimics the stage of the self that cannot be reduced to a fundamental statement of what 'I believe'. We witness the bundle of events, visions, movements and ideas from the world providing the fundamental staging for the 'I' and for belief.

The bundle of events of the self are reflected in the 'mixtape' of songs with the theme of *work* accompany the piece: we can work it out, work work work work work, work it and so on. A bundle of songs that, collected here, reveal work to be no mere activity subordinated to a greater goal, but a process that takes central stage in the negotiations and hauntings of movements between bodies in the collective space.

The making of the piece is often implicit and gestural; yet it also takes place in language, through informal conversations and intimate chats that happen in the midst of bodies haunting one another. The verbal re-composing reveals the act of production to be precisely the what the production aims at staging. The decisions take place with and through unforeseen events that the dancers undergo: toilet breaks, bleeding feet, spectators joining the passage of movements. Movements and gestures arise in a constant negotiation with the unplanned body, with bladders and blood. The discipline of

negotiation produces a space for a vulnerability and loss of control, in which a pregnant or bleeding body becomes a catalyst to new forms of movement as opposed to an obstruction to a grand plan.

### **Costumes and Concepts**

The audience, on a perspectival and permeable border, are not meant to ingest one concept of collectivity here; the piece evades the emptiness of easy conceptuality, but neither does it slip into pure pleasure, entertainment or formal or technical prowess. Rather, instead of the concepts lying 'behind' the piece, they are produced in 'front' of the piece, by the audience, who are given the space and time to breath, mentally, inside the space and times between gradually repeated movements. A pseudo-manifesto or fractured treatise is handed out as the dancers enter. Rather than dictating Futurist-style prescriptions, this document of playful sketches allows the audience to find their own conceptual maps. These ideas allow for an affective and sensual navigation of the utopian club that unfolds on the dancefloor. In this club, everything from the outside world returns, without beginning or ending, but always transformed.

The costumes have the fit and form of 'streetwear' from everyday life, but there is definiteness of color and distribution of the garments that prevents any simple mimicking of the 'universal' "man on the street." The uncanny co-ordination of colour means that the streetwear is not a simple repetition of the normalized everyday, but neither is it a formalist rejection of "low culture." The props add to this blurring of the formal space with the everyday: a full-body mirror, an exercise ball, a bucket, a potted plant. These artificial everyday objects are strikingly definite in their selection, producing a kind of hyper-everydayness, taken up in tactile play stripped of use value. A bright silver blow-up rubber ball is no longer a mass-produced object of industry, but a reflective and undifferentiated surface upon which lights and bodies roll.

Through setting, movement, props, costume and sound, WOWOWOW stages the haunting of each action by the worlds of the street and the stage; this haunting remains invisible to the 'I' that ties itself to itself based on the thin conceits of consumer 'choice,' the 'free' market, patriarchy, colonialism and so on. The ending of the piece reflects this invisibility: suddenly the space is pitch black, all too briefly, like a near-death experience, never fully grasped, but always there. Passages and memories work in their fullness, breathing beneath the straight-jacket of the normalized self.

*WOWOWOW is a dance performance with and by the dancers' collective Fanclub (DK) and choreographer Quim Bigas (ES). The piece premiered in March 2019 at Koncertkirken c/o Dansehallerne in Copenhagen, Denmark. For more info: [fanclubdance.com/wowowow/](http://fanclubdance.com/wowowow/)*