

## Does It Matter? Composite Bodies and Posthuman Prototypes in Contemporary Performing Arts

**DAY 1 – Tuesday March 17th, 2015: Co-creative processes and performances**

**Location: Ghent University, Het Pand (Onderbergen 1, 9000 Gent)**

- **Mylène Benoît (KEYNOTE)**

As a visual artist and filmmaker, I pursued art studies concerning the practice of contemporary media, first in London and Paris and later at Le Fresnoy, national studio for contemporary art. In 2004 I founded the dance company Contour Progressif in Lille (F). After having worked intensively on the image, I was attentive to the fascination with and worried about the proliferation of images, in an attempt to avoid a naive relation with technology. I wanted to alter my perspective, to consider images and contemporary techniques of representation from the point of view of another medium, in order to be able observe them.

The body is not pure, free from contamination, but, on the contrary, a porous body onto which another image gets projected, turning it into an excessively mediatised body, ventriloquized by and impressed by (in the photographic sense) images.

Dance appeared to me as a tool to investigate the codes shaping our bodies, as a mode of observation of new definitions of the contemporary body. Therefore I created several choreographic performances questioning the relation between the body and the images of our mediatised society: the video game in *Effet Papillon (Butterfly Effect, 2007)*, images of war in *La chair du monde (The flesh of the world, 2009)*, the scopic double in *ICI (Here, 2010)*, the figure of the woman in horror movies in *Wonder (2012)*. In these pieces, the image and the body question each other mutually, essentially, substantially. Excerpts of performances will support the presentation.

Mylène Benoît is a French visual artist and choreographer, trained at the University of Westminster in London (BA in Contemporary media practice), and at the University of Paris 8 (Master in Hyperdocuments multimedia), then at Fresnoy, National Studio of Contemporary Arts of Tourcoing. She founded the dance company Contour Progressif in 2004. Her choreographic works explore the way technology and media affect the reality of the human body. Her works are currently on tour in France, Germany, Belgium and Brazil. She is associated to the theater Vivat (Armentières) from september 2011.

- **Martina Ruhsam – Non-human actors or The political implications of contemporary object-invested choreographies**

My lecture will focus on performances in which objects/things play a main role. I will investigate the potentials of a new social dealing with the material world that surrounds us – decoupled from instrumentality and relations of property and domination. By analyzing performances of Clément

Layes, Mette Ingvarsten and Lisa Hinterreithner/Jack Hauser and by linking them with concepts in object-oriented philosophy and new materialism (Latour, Bennett, Barad, Garcia), I attempt to rethink the materiality of the human through amalgamations and reassemblages of the animate and inanimate in order to propose a being-in-commons, beyond communitarianism and anthropomorphism, as a condition of new possibilities for politics. How do we choreograph things and how do they choreograph us? And does the staging of a moving with objects or choreographic critiques of objects implicate a new ethics of things that would entail a different ecological and political awareness?

Martina Ruhsam is a choreographer, performer and writer. Her artistic works were presented at several venues in Europe. She was working in the theory department in Tanzquartier Wien and is a member of the editorial boards of *Corpus – Internet Magazine for Dance, Choreography and Performance* and *Maska. Performing Arts Journal*. She published essays in several publications dedicated to the performing arts as well as a book on choreography as collaborative practice (Turia + Kant, 2011). Currently she is completing a phd at the Justus-Liebig University in Gießen.

- **Stefan Apostolou-Hölscher – Remembering the Anthropo(centric) Age**

In my paper I would like to ask the question what exactly had been, according to the distinction Michel Foucault develops between four different epistemes in his *The Order of Things*, the ‘anthropocentric age’. I want to do so by referring to this age as one primarily of human practice – in which the world was centered around and being produced by ways of doing and making by and for the human animal – and in the sense of both an age of the human in singular and as her species being in plural. In contrast to various so-called post-human(ist) discourses I would like to argue that it is very important and even more urgent, especially with regard to political questions, to keep a certain notion not only of the human being in particular but also of humanity in general as important categories. In a first step I would like to argue for an age not of anthropocentrism but for one of humanism, referring mainly to Immanuel Kant’s concept of common sense in his *Critique of the Power of Judgement* from 1790, Hanna Arendt’s approach to Kant’s *Third Critique* in her *The Life of the Mind* from 1978, and Alfred Schmidt’s reading of Ludwig Feuerbach as the first radical philosopher of practice in his *Emancipatory Sensibility* from 1973. In a second step I will reflect this problematic to the field of performance and choreography, where indeed human bodies are disappearing these days. Their disappearance I would like to read as a symptom for a wider epistemic rupture we are witnessing, one which, according to Foucault, might make the human disappear like a face in the sand in a not too far future.

Stefan Apostolou-Hölscher studied Applied Theatre Studies in Gießen from 2001 till 2008. From 2009 till 2013 he worked there as a research associate for the MA program *Choreography and*

Performance – he defended his PhD *Capable Bodies: Contemporary Dance Between Aesthetics and Biopolitics* in 2014 and currently is a research associate for the Chair of Philosophy and Aesthetic Theory at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. His position is connected to the part project *Inferior Mimesis* of the DFG research group “Media and Mimesis“.

- **Daniel Blanga-Gubbay – As a cloud driven by the wind.**

With the words «I hereby resign from art» imprinted on a postcard in 1985 Joseph Beuys seems to retrospectively summarize what has been the whole attempt of his art: withdrawing from the image, resisting the achieved discourse.

Beuys shows above all the potentiality of this interruption: different equal possibilities dwell always in the same matter and no future form is predetermined or necessary. The matter does not have a unique destiny, rather it exposes an uncertainty that asks to be investigated in the present. The matter emerges from the point of view of its sheer contingency of becoming any form, «*as a cloud driven by the wind*», and Beuys’ artistic measures all aim to impart an energetic charge to bare material that he brings into play as non-human performer of the creation.

While opening a reflection on *(Im)possible futures* and the notion of *non-human contingency*, this lecture puts into question the very form of its presentation. Scholars in Humanities often use images while presenting their thoughts and reflections: power points are prepared following a unique line, and images in presentation are used to sustain a single given discourse. But what if these images, while refusing to follow a single line and appearing all together as in a warburgian constellation, were able to suggest completely different connections and different possible discourses in the empty space among them?

This lecture discloses a space where the notion of co-creative processes affects suddenly content and form; it shares a possible discourse, but it presents it as one of a kind; it discloses a space where images – in their different impulses, as a wind coming from different directions – open up the vitality of any uncertain relation.

- **Peter Eckersall & Kris Verdonck (KEYNOTE)**

### **On Composite Bodies and New Media Dramaturgy: A conversation with Kris Verdonck**

This dialogue with the artist and performance maker Kris Verdonck will explore the dramaturgical significance in his work of the invention of composite bodies, prototypes and machinic objects. Kris’s utilization of objects is often termed as ‘figures’ and ‘actors’ that are agents to express poetic sensibilities and an uncanny politics that questions our existential relationships and our sense of place in the world. His work aims to ‘ask what ... objects and machines can tell us about what they do’. How are they organized, and what clarity or discipline of agency or effect might arise in



Maybe theater should not represent the world but create situations and rooms in which we can speculatively create new realities: An apparatus. There's the Internet, there's the Darknet, there's the net that projects central perspective over pictures, thus reconfiguring perception, and there's the net of longitude and latitude that encompasses the globe. The oldest network, which we've learned about only recently, is the Wood Wide Web. It bears the name mycorrhiza and is the largest network in the world. Consisting of subterranean fungal filaments, mycorrhiza not only guarantees the life of plants, it also organizes their communication to a large degree. Mycorrhiza: An Apparatus followed this example of fungus and plants. For seven weeks the boiler room of the Uferstudios became a fungus breeding ground, a space of illusion, a site of intermingling and deception, an artistic laboratory. Various artists worked in this room full of fungus, populating it with art, life, and the traces that were left behind. The mycelium grew in obscurity and generated visible fruiting bodies. In my lecture I would like to present this project which dealt in a parallel way with human and non-human actants in the space. Artists involved were among others Ariel Ashbel, cobratheater.cobra, Kate McIntosh, Eva Meyer-Keller, Oblivia and Orthographe.

Dr. Stefanie Wenner holds a PhD in Philosophy of FU Berlin, has been working as a curator in the field of performing arts and theater since 2001, from 2007 – 2012 she was curator for theater at Hebbel Am Ufer (HAU) Berlin, she was the dramaturge of Impulse Theater Biennale 2013, she has been and still is a lecturer at various Schools and Universities such as HZT Berlin, HGBK Leipzig, HfBK Dresden, FU Berlin, RU Bochum, is writing her habilitation at Universität Hildesheim (Theater Studies) on new realism on stage. Research interests include new materialism, history on stage and the art of illusion.

- **Franziska Bork-Petersen: Performing utopia**

Bodies – their behaviour, diet and dress – used to be integral parts of utopias such as Thomas More's genre-defining book *Utopia* (1516) or the architectural vision *New Babylon* (1959-74) by the artist Constant. More recently, technologies such as doping, neuro enhancement or cosmetic surgery have allowed bodies to appear increasingly as sites of utopia *themselves*. How has this affected the body in performance?

Where the performing arts are conventionally fraught with bodies, a number of recent works have left voids. Drawing on my postdoctoral research project about the paradoxical relation of bodies to utopianism, I want to analyse these pieces as proposing a corporeality that is itself utopian: they allude to the utopia of an absent/incorporeal body. Choreographer Eszter Salamon specifically imagines a 'bodiless world' in *Tales of the Bodiless* (2011). She omits bodies and their movement for large parts of the performance and confronts the audience with a pitch black stage. Mette Ingvarsen creates full-length 'dance' works with choreographed smoke in *Evaporated Landscapes* (2009) and

confetti in *The Artificial Nature Project* (2012), and *Stille teater* (2008) by Kirstine Roepstorff replaces the actor's body on stage with a mobile installation and voices from loudspeakers.

Looking at these performances through the prism of utopianism highlights the pieces shared allusion to *the impossible*. In the context of the hyper-visible, and 'enhanced' bodies that dominate today's popular culture, proposing the body as absent can be understood as a mode of utopian critique.

Franziska Bork Petersen is working on a postdoc project that relates notions of the body to notions of utopianism. She holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from Stockholm University and Freie Universität Berlin. Franziska lectures on dance, performance, fashion and curating at the University of Copenhagen, the Danish National School of Performing Arts, Stockholm University and Stockholm's University of Dance and Circus.

- **Aline Wiame – We Are Puppets: A Deleuzian approach to the ethics of mechanical performances**

This paper aims at proposing a “constructivist” approach of marionettes and automata on contemporary stages, rather than a uniquely critical understanding of their presence as a “loss” of life or humanity. Gilles Deleuze's propositions about the special freedom of marionettes help us better understand what they can bring to a posthumanist point of view. Although very discreet, the “marionette theme” (puppets, mechanical dolls, automata, mimes and mummies) is recurrent in Deleuze's work. This theme allows him to develop the potential of Kleist's proposition according to which “[...] grace returns after knowledge has gone through the world of the infinite, in that it appears to best advantage in that human bodily structure that has no consciousness at all – or has infinite consciousness – that is, in the mechanical puppet, or in the God”. In the Deleuzian drama which is not “privileging mankind in any way”, mechanical puppets thus appear as an experimentation on the temporality of post-anthropocentric freedom and as a way of creating assemblages beyond human/non-human divisions. In order to test the efficiency of Deleuze's propositions to apprehend our post-anthropocentric stages, I propose to confront them to Heiner Goebbels' play *Stifters Dinge*, created in 2008. Confronting a non-human, mechanical assemblage with Stifter's romantic writings, the play is a genuine lab of what kind of “grace” can be produced when human components melt in broader landscapes of a new kind.

Aline Wiame holds a PhD in philosophy from the Université Libre de Bruxelles, where she currently works as a post-doctoral researcher, after having been Visiting scholar at Penn State University (USA) in 2013-2014. Her research mainly focuses on the ways through which theatre develops its own way of thinking, which can open up new propositional forces in philosophy. She works mainly on contemporary French philosophy (Bergson, Souriau, Deleuze, Foucault) and William James' pragmatism. She is a member of the Performance Philosophy network and of the Labo LAPS

- **Evelin Brosi / Arne De Winde – Gamper-Machine #3 – Human after All**

With their Gamper Machines the artistic duo Evelin Brosi and the literary scholar Arne De Winde explore the poetic and performative potential of word processing, i.e. the process of compressing, (re-)ordering, copying, moving, transferring, manipulating textual materials. The machineries and writing instruments they develop are based on codes, constraints and scripts that explore the stress field between autogenerative dynamics and contingency. On the one hand, the machines initiate an extremely codified and programmed multimedial process, seemingly operating without human agency; on the other hand, the automaton turns out to be highly dependent on the singularity of its performative context. The machines can be considered as experimental arrangements, interconnecting different media and modes (auditory, corporeal, graphic, scriptural, etc.) and testing not in the least the spectators themselves.

Gamper Machine #1 (2013) was presented at a workshop with Michael Gamper himself at the VUB. Giving a paper was being transmuted from the discursive mode of a “single coherent being” into a co-creative and multimedial process or encounter permanently destabilizing the human agent(s). This co-creative performance ultimately resulted in giving Michael Gamper a paper, i.e. a typoscript in which the captured motions and sounds of the performers were typographically represented.

Gamper Machine #2 (2014) was performed as a keynote lecture-performance at the MDRN conference Listening to Literature 1900-1950 at the University of Leuven. The one-hour audiographic experiment, interconnecting typographic and auditory parameters in order to de- and reconstruct synopses of the Belgian soap opera *Thuis*, was broadcasted by Radio Scorpio.

With Gamper Machine #3 Evelin Brosi and Arne De Winde will develop a site-specific script and machinery, responding to the specific context and contents of the Does it Matter conference. By confronting the audience/spectators with a radical – and thus unsettling – materiality the performance triggers a form of “concrete comedy”, wavering between unease and laughter.

Evelin Brosi (°1976, Temse) has a background in typography, media design and desktop publishing. Nowadays she predominantly processes words. Her work deals with the materialities of communication, more specifically writing and text and the evolving understanding of these notions under the influence of technological and institutional developments. Next to this she apparently owns a hairdresser's salon in Backnang, Baden-Württemberg.

Arne De Winde is a postdoctoral Research Fellow of the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) at the University of Leuven. He has published on contemporary German literature (Reinhard Jirgl, Thomas Meinecke, Heiner Müller etc.), word & image interaction, intertextuality and -mediality, the unbearable as aesthetic category, protest and performativity, the reception of discourses of the Conservative Revolution (and more specifically, Oswald Spengler).

