

ZUNGE

THEMEN

ANALYSEN / KRITIKEN

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Burning down das Hirschgeweih

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"Revenge on pixel-ised faces and flattened physicality"

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VIENNALE 07: Drift

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The existence of something else

Analyse statt Empathie

The Sound of Silence

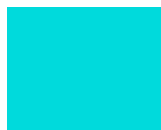
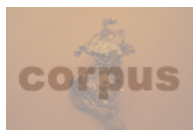
Ceci n'est pas un nu

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Die utopische Wirklichkeit

Baktruppen tanzen

A choreography of disquiet



RUNNING BACKWARD IN ADVANCE OF ONESELF

BRUNO BELTRÃO and GRUPO DE RUA premiere *H3* at Brussels' KunstenFESTIVALdesArts

by **Jeroen Peeters**

Expanding hip-hop with yet another movement dialect has never been his interest. For that, he is too critical of hip-hop's branding strategies, just as claiming a single language is too narrow a space for developing complex thought. That we humans are anyway all too keen on pursuing habits and patterns is one of the concerns that underpins Bruno Beltrão's ironic deconstruction of hip-hop dances with his Grupo de Rua. Recurring strategies in Beltrão's pieces are embracing contradiction and exposing hip-hop's phraseology to other cultural languages, not in the last instance that of the theatre. Still, the potentially rambunctious energies of clashing languages were always tamed by captions and waterproof dramaturgy – Jérôme Bel's mark on the work.

If the new creation *H3* lands in another place, perhaps this is why: it exchanges dramaturgy for a choreographic approach and speaks beyond irony. For the first time, Beltrão moves beyond the predominance of hip-hop lineages and focuses on the exploration his Grupo de Rua's idiosyncratic languages. There is still plenty of dribbling footwork and popping chests in *H3*, but the ambiguity, richness and density of gesture makes one forget about hip-hop. The latter's virtuoso but customary chatter gives way to doubt and the wayward mind of a major artist that starts to find his own language. *H3* has some flaws and lacks in radical choices when it comes to music, but it is Beltrão's most complex and compelling work to date.

Brimming gestures

The stage is dimly lit, wrapping its edges in shadow, dark areas for the dancers to hide. Very slowly, over the course of fifteen minutes or so, they will trickle one by one into the lit area up front, joining the others seated there cross-legged. A projected window glides along the walls while we hear persistent street noise: as if we were in a dance studio somewhere in Rio de Janeiro. Seated close to each other, two dancers make frenetic gestures along their bodies' contours, gestures that waver between mapping absence and shielding off, marking the sphere of interaction with the other. But then they change quickly into exploring the other's proximity with abrupt moves, challenging each other's kinesphere.

Duets are *H3*'s main form: both a choreographic and a social frame imposed upon hip-hop's figure of the macho solo performer showing off in a frontal setting. The variety is large: teasing and shadow-boxing, patting and covering each other's backs, some unison and counterpoint, but also wild interaction reminiscent of krumping, throwing and trashing the other. Whether slow or fast, each gesture is brimming with energy, exuding as often conflict as playfulness. The movement's centrifugal quality exudes very different overtones: from reaching toward the other, standing in the world, to getting rid of the violent forces one is haunted by. The duet introduces an altogether different understanding of identity, which departs from intersubjectivity. That the spatial setting initially harks back to hip-hop helps to keep the other extreme in view.

Negotiating spaces

After a while, the choreography is pulled into space, with the dancers juxtaposing and mingling their duets into all kinds of permutations and configurations. The stage is now fully lit, an electronic soundtrack accompanies the dance. Now we are so to speak in a theatre, a space that requires negotiation as well. The frontal space of the solo performer is extended to the theatre's vertical plane, and then flipped down, underscored by the light design that marks a square on the floor. A black mirroring floor, by the way, that is also present in the screeching noises of sneakers, which also return as samples in the soundtrack. Yet, all these dramaturgical elucidations are already evident in the choreography itself, which plays with levels and negotiates the space's borders in bodies spinning and whirling all over.

Again, it is on the level of gesture and attitude that *H3*'s many spaces show their depth and meaning. Most prominent are the various moments in which the dancers are running backward rapidly, one by one, in duets after being thrown into the arena by four colleagues, or everyone together. Once more the dancers embrace absence, this time including the endless space behind their backs, symbolizing their own blind spots. Variations are throwing one's head in the neck and remain wandering slowly: insecure as movement, powerful as a gesture of exposure. Though *H3* is often spectacular because of its highly energetic flow, it doesn't seek to end on a high note. While the light has by then opened up the horizon once again, flooding the space, the dancers break up their phrases, ramble on a little. Before you can realize the choreography suddenly falls apart, it is swallowed by a black-out. It is like running in advance of oneself, blind into the unknown – understood as a deliberate and utmost contemporary statement about vulnerability and subjectivation.

Dates and Links

www.grupoderua.com

22–24 May, Hebbel am Ufer Berlin (www.hebbel-am-ufer.de)

1 June, Festival Internacional de las artes de Castilla y Leon Salamanca (www.festivalcyl.com)

18–19 June, Grand Théâtre du Luxembourg (www.theatres.lu)

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