

Contemporary Dance in the Context of Slovak and European Discourse

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Abstract: In 2006, five young Slovak dancers Milan Herich, Milan Tomášik, Anton Lachký, Peter Jaško, and Martin Kilvady founded an independent Les SlovaKs Dance Collective in Brussels, which is one of the centres of contemporary dance. Les SlovaKs focused mainly on contemporary dance, and gradually each of the members devised his own language and unique means of expression. In parallel with their interpretive activities, they also began to work as choreographers. Their cooperation oscillated between foreign and Slovak productions. In no time, Les SlovaKs dancers ranked among the top contemporary dancers, and the collective's work and direction represent one of the fundamental impulses for Slovak and Central European contemporary dance. In addition to characterising the poetics of this collective connecting "domestic" and "world" attributes, the study focuses especially on the work of choreographer Anton Lachký, who puts to use extreme music means of expression in both his creation and the Puzzle Work technique of composition.

Keywords: contemporary dance, Kathak, dance composition, Puzzle Work, Les SlovaKs, Anton Lachký

Slovak-Belgian Les SlovaKs

In recent decades, contemporary dance has been undergoing diversification and transformation into one of the most progressive fields of art. New systems of composition are being introduced to a strictly dance discourse especially from live art¹, but also theatre and digital media². Establishing the artist position of dramaturg in contemporary dance should not be overlooked,

1 For more see GOLDBERG, R. L. *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*. New York : Thames & Hudson, 2011, pp. 207 – 215.

2 Among contemporary creative professionals experimenting with new sonic and visual technologies is American performer Andrew Schneider. For more information visit: <https://www.andrewjs.com>.

as its starting principles of work are different from those of dramaturgy and yet, its contribution to an open dialogue during the creation process is equally important.³ Contemporary dance, despite its partial inclination to work with the text and flirt with performativity⁴, is primarily created via movement as the predominant means of expression. Thanks to this a priori ability to communicate based on physical expression it is regarded as one of the few export and competitive commodities.

Considering the fact that the early attempts at modern, and later, contemporary dance, were made in our territory as late as the early 1980s, within Slovak art, it gained international recognition within a comparatively short period of time.⁵ The plethora of international festivals focusing on contemporary dance is a proof of the expansive nature of dance,⁶ i.e., of platforms annually featuring the names of Slovak male and female dancers and choreographers. However, it is debatable whether Les SlovaKs Dance Collective which is the focus of our study, should be referred to as a Slovak dance collective, since up until recently, its members, five Slovak male dancers, and presently, well-known choreographers, Milan Herich, Milan Tomášik, Anton Lachký, Peter Jaško, and Martin Kilváy, lived and worked in Belgium.

Since the 1990s, Brussels has been among the most sought-after centres of contemporary dance, and P.A.R.T.S.⁷ dance school is to be given credit for

3 By that I mean the current tendency to establish this art position at the level of training and education at the academies of art and universities. For more information on the topic see an essay by dance dramaturg Anna Mokotow. MOKOTOW, A. Decentring Dance Dramaturgy. In *The Theatre Times*, 1 September 2016. [online]. Available at: <<https://thetheatretimes.com/decentring-dance-dramaturgy/>>.

4 By that I mean an input of other means of expression in contemporary dance, working with video, text, deliberate transgression of genre and art norms/aesthetics, and the interdisciplinarity of genres.

5 Alongside Les SlovaKs, one may list a generation of male and female dancers and choreographers of the middle generation, i.e., in their forties. Of them, Jaro Viňarský and his collaboration with the Belgian choreographer Karine Ponties, is worth mentioning. In 2013, he was awarded Bessie Awards for a solo in *The Painted Bird*. Among them is also Daniel Raček and his collaboration with the Norwegian choreographer Karen Foss or Nikoleta Rafaelisová and Andrej Petrovič and their collaboration with Akram Khan in Akram Khan Company.

6 International dance festivals like ImpulzTanz (Vienna), Full Moon (Pyhäjärvi), b12 (Berlin,) and others.

7 P.A.R.T.S. is a European centre of education and research in contemporary dance, whose international character builds on the work of visiting professors, lecturers, and practitioners covering dance, martial arts, meditations, visual art or performance art. Another

that. While being in Belgium, Les SlovaKs put on stage several fundamental productions: *Opening Night* (2007), *Journey to Home* (2009), *The Concert* (2010), and *Fragments* (2012). Despite being short-lived,⁸ the collective with its four productions gained local recognition followed by an intensive international tour after each production. It is worthwhile mentioning that the collective operated as a dance group without a choreographer and its productions were noted for their structured improvisation. The above productions demonstrate a visible progress in the range of expression employed by each creative professional, his specificities and inclination towards diverse systems of compositional procedures within the choreographic and interpretive work.

The short existence of the group was also influenced by the fact that over time, the work of individual members as performers and choreographers expanded, they left Brussels and expanded internationally. Milan Tomášik went to live and work in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he was engaged in his solo projects and in collaboration with the SEAD dance school in Salzburg. In addition to his solo career, Milan Herich has performed in productions of the dance group *Ultima Vez* under the direction of Belgian choreographer Wim Vandekeybus and collaborated with Belgian-Moroccan choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. For almost 15 years now, he has been an assistant to the Venezuelan-American choreographer David Zambrano. Martin Kilvály was a member of the well-known Belgian dance group ROSAS and *Ultima Vez*, later on, he collaborated with David Zambrano and Chris Parkinson, he has also given several workshops at P.A.R.T.S. He currently works on projects in his residential centre in Belgium. Peter Jaško, like his colleagues from Les SlovaKs, collaborated with David Zambrano and Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and at the same time, he pursues his solo and pedagogical careers. After graduating from the Ján Levoslav Bella Conservatory in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia), Anton Lachký joined the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava, modern dance, which he left after a short time and enrolled at the P.A.R.T.S. dance school and became a student of the school's founder Anne Teresa de Keers-

reputable school in European space is SEAD based in Salzburg, Austria, with study programmes similar to those of P.A.R.T.S. and with an even more experimental approach, with prevalent masterclasses and workshops and with lecturers from diverse fields of humanities.

8 Officially, Les SlovaKs existed between 2007 and 2018. The group's dissolution date reflects the fact that recently, Les SlovaKs dance collective has not put on a new production, although in 2018, *Journey Home* had its dernière at the Greek Kalamata International Dance Festival.

maeker (Rosas). In 2004, as a performer, he went on a two-year world tour with the dance production MA directed and choreographed by Akram Khan.

Inspirations – Integration – Implementation

Anton Lachký, who took up folk dance as a three-year-old boy, after graduating from the Slovak schools mentioned above, embarked on a collaboration with acclaimed choreographers in Belgium. He maintained that collaboration with Akram Khan, an English dancer and choreographer of Bangladeshi descent, had a profound impact on him: “There is definitely an influence of a friend of mine, a choreographer, who I have been working with, Akram Khan. He has been using a lot of Kathak dance precision and a lot of speed.”⁹ By combining the elements of Slovak folk dance with the most current composition choreographic approaches, Lachký created Puzzle Work, his own choreographic, interpretive and training dance technique. It is a combination of the elements of martial arts, mostly karate and Afro-Brazilian capoeira, Slovak folk dance elements, and the transformed principles of Akram Khan, such as working with the detail and the elements of Indian traditional dance Kathak.¹⁰ At the same time, the choreographic system makes use of the dancer’s self-assertive nature, i.e., of the predisposition and inclination toward an extraordinary dynamics of a plastic body, as well as of the dance performer’s own experience.

While Akram Khan “tells stories,”¹¹ Anton Lachký notionally turns to the ancient ideal – one could speak of *kalokagathia*, a philosophy of a bodily, moral, and spiritual whole. His entire creation and work with Les SlovaKs are imbued with the elemental joy of sheer dance. Lachký is relaxed in physical expression, notwithstanding the dynamic changes of his body which are centre-controlled.¹² Flexibility is enhanced by constant movement filling in the entire space. He transforms the body’s frenetic movement into scenic form and makes the space literally pulsate. Although Anton Lachký’s creation may

9 Interview is available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiPWUuLjCY4>.

10 The traditional Indian dance Kathak is noted for its particularly rigid figures based on precise gestures or complex movement and speed.

11 Akram Khan keeps accentuating that among the ambitions of creation has always been a desire to tell stories. For more visit: <https://www.akramkhancompany.net/productions/the-silent-burn-project/>.

12 The centre is to be understood as the bottom part of the abdomen, where energy is activated.



Anton Lachký

be regarded as fixed improvisation, he has choreographic thinking and an ability to react ad hoc within the given spatial arrangement. Solos alternate with duets and group choreographies take over. The final scenic form considerably unmask the assignment given during the rehearsal process. The body and its dynamics and expression possibilities are among the exposed resonators. In places, it may appear to be a manifestation of the dancer's movement possibilities, with Anton Lachký's choreographic approach building on stamina and explosiveness. Performance orientation combined with exceptional dynamics is evocative of Anton Lachký's endeavour to push the body beyond its limits in contemporary dance. One level up, apprehension, even fear of death, is evoked. The moments of tranquillity and physical peace are disrupted and eliminated by the dynamics of dance scores. Here Anton Lachký's choreographies seem to allude to ontic, ontological even, need of the modern world and of the human,¹³ which is the cause of producing con-

13 Ontological need is, said in the words of the Czech phenomenologist Anna Hogenová, "need which by its nature is a situation when life is at stake. (...) The human loses certainty (...). It is a risk of something we are unable to name exactly, which is frightening, which changes into the possibility of death." See HOGENOVÁ, A. *Život je dar, za který se taky musí platit* [Life Is a Gift You Once Have to Pay for]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpkCWKJ8Qqo&t=767s>. In Anton Lachký, an effort to delay the moment of "self- encounter" is reflected in creation which is life per se. However, in a dynamic pace and in the processes of continuous creation fear is accentuated.

stant movement. Puzzle Work delays the moment of slowing-down and, in a way, responds to and even replicates the modern globalised world which is dependent on the speed of information in the distribution process. As if an opposite pole is non-existent, as if there only existed running without a possibility to breathe out, life without solitude is disrupted by countless impulses representing complicated and physically challenging dance scores. His recent choreographic work offers more performative elements of contemporary dance, such as working with the text in the form of the dancers' verbalised expression, theatricality,¹⁴ and an effort to implement distinctly dramatic elements of theatre.

Pushing away

One of the fundamental transformation processes of Anton Lachký's choreographic and directorial work lies in the musical side of his productions – specifically, in the transition from reproduced electronic music to classical, often canonised, works of classical music. While the productions of Les SlovaKs worked exclusively with authorial scenic music, which was composed for them by the French composer Simon Thierrée, Anton Lachký withdrew from a close collaboration with the composer and opted for reproduced music. Apparently, the nature of the Puzzle Work technique of dance training and composition as a physically extremely challenging and dynamic work required acoustic back-up. When Lachký first began with Puzzle Work, techno music became an integral part of work sessions, workshops, and the rehearsal process. In a pragmatic sense, it was an acoustic support for a long and physically strenuous performance of the participants.

14 By that I mean returning to the systems of composition of the first or second avant-garde, which gave up on the purity of genres and created works of interdisciplinary nature. By that I specifically mean inspiration by Greek or medieval theatre which culminated in performance art in the form of the live art genre typology which is a condensation of largely visual arts and performing arts. Among its compositional pillars is the work with presentness, public space, active viewer, and ephemerality. In contemporary dance it is distinct work with the conventional dramatic arc, work with the text, be in monologue or dialogue form. For more see MUSILOVÁ, M. Teatralita veřejných událostí – uvedení do problematiky [An Introduction to Theatricality of Public Events]. In *Theatralia*, 2014, Vol. 6, Issue 1, pp. 9 – 24. Available at: https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/129835/1_Theatralia_17-2014-1_5.pdf?sequence=1.

Techno music, its emergence and variously modified sub-genres, came to the fore in Great Britain, on the verge of the 1980s. Among the distinctive characteristics of techno music, also when it comes to Anton Lachký's choreographic creation, is BEAT. It constitutes its essence, with BPM¹⁵ ranging between 120 and 200 beats, which determines dynamic and atmospheric character, i.e., from "chill out techno" to "dark and raw techno." A component part of rave genre is its presentation, which is standardised to sets running several hours or even days long.¹⁶ The seemingly monotonous nature of techno music aids the basic principle of Puzzle Work and performance orientation. Techno BEAT, its bass tones, produce a robust sound which makes the listener feel the resonation of body organs. Among the dominant Puzzle Work features is also employing the elements of traditional folk dance, irrespective of its regional origin. The musical elements are concentrated on legs and on footwork, and Anton Lachký puts to use the steps, foot stumping, jumps, and bounces peculiar to the Slovak regions of Horehronie and Detva.¹⁷ The two Slovak regions are characterised by rotating dances, and part of their choreographic structure is a solo improvised dance"¹⁸ with various embellishments. This choreography also works with steps, specifically "symmetrical repeated shuffle steps, transferring weight from one foot to the other or various modifications of the sliding step, such as step side single, double, or triple."¹⁹

The way Anton Lachký combines techno and Slovak folk dances is suggestive of the choreographic thinking of his teacher Akram Khan, who also combines two basic elements in his choreographies – the traditional Indian Kathak dance whose rigid form is intertwined with the elements of contemporary dance. Formally, Anton Lachký employs a similar principle, and replaces Kathak with the Slovak folk dance elements peculiar to him which are

15 BPM – Beats per Minute.

16 A standard techno party format at Berghain Club in Berlin goes on non-stop for the entire weekend. It goes without saying that it is not featuring a single DJ or music producer. Concrete sets take 4 to 6 hours on the average. An essential part of a techno party is acoustic and physical experience of full-sounding bass tones causing the body parts to vibrate. Visually, a techno party is aesthetically anchored in minimalism for the most part, whereby one of the few elements is stroboscope or video-mapping or videoart.

17 Horehronie and Detva are regions located in the central part of the Slovak Republic.

18 DÚŽEK, S. – GARAJ, B. *Slovenské ľudové tance a hudba na sklonku 20. storočia* [Slovak Folk Dances and Music at the End of the 20th Century]. Bratislava : Ústav hudobnej vedy Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2001, p. 29.

19 Ibid.

combined with the systems of composition and means of expression unique to contemporary dance, whereby the concept is singularised by a distinctive work with isolations.

The concept of isolation and its use can be found in various dance techniques. Its character is unique to each of them, but the common starting point is a precise execution of a specific movement – its origin, quality, and the possibilities of expression. A significant feature is synchronous work of several movement centres independently coexisting side by side. They are interconnected by the dancer's body and the technique is based on a combination of different movement qualities of concrete centres. The basic centres are made up of a vertical division of the body, i.e., first comes the head and the neck, followed by hands and legs come last. Throughout the process, more complex movement and dance combinations are added with the hands divided into two centres – the left and the right, etc. The more centres are under the dancer's control, the wider the range of movement, the more diverse, mobile, and more plastic the movement becomes. Anton Lachký's system of composition enables the dancers to work in a more diverse fashion. One of the features of isolation could be movement detection, which is aimed at determining a concrete movement, its quality, of a specific body part. Another form of isolation is used mainly in improvisation, with the work being focused on a concrete movement, which when repeated and rehearsed across various qualities, creates space for researching it.

Like Akram Khan, Anton Lachký pursues composition dichotomy. On the one hand, it is tradition and history embodied in discipline, something very spiritual and sacred. On the other hand, it is contemporaneity offering a scientific laboratory and a range of possibilities. The elements of the Slovak folk dance are a certainty for Anton Lachký, literally, they are a pillar with a clearly ordered and almost changeless structure. Combined with the elements of contemporary dance, in which the attributes and qualities of a dancer/interpreter/performer are determined mainly on the basis of the dancer's flow and centre work, flexibility, etc. (i.e., not strictly on mastering a specific technique), choreographically, Anton Lachký's Puzzle Work is unparalleled globally. If one understands that parts of folk dance, especially of Horehronie and Detva regions, or their derivatives, constitute a component part of the Puzzle Work system taught all over the world, one can say that it is a very specific language with clear cultural roots.

Anton Lachký clearly belongs to a group of choreographers, contemporising traditional folk dance. The shift may be seen especially in his choreo-

graphic work and in the existence of folk dance elements in other than traditional context. He deals mainly with the variability and plasticity of the selected folk dance elements. Like Akram Khan, who integrated Kathak and its elements into his choreographic work, Anton Lachký incorporated folk dance elements, in both cases, however, it is about recontextualising the tradition. A characteristic feature of this process is the dichotomy of the traditional and the new (non-traditional). In Anton Lachký's staging practice the reference to Slovak folk dance is apparent and it constitutes a pillar of his creation, however, digression from tradition lies especially in the absence of rituality which used to be the quintessence of a concrete dance. The event initiating the dance and determining its nature, be it transient, ceremonial, "ritual" dance²⁰ or the celebration of cyclical events,²¹ is no longer a stimulus for the dance per se. The point of departure for traditional folk dance, i.e., the relationship between form and content, is reduced to a set of concrete dance steps, figures, or entire scores. These are combined with other means of expression of contemporary dance, regardless of their content, formal, cultural or religious tradition associated with the content. The decisive factor in choosing a specific movement or dance step, exceptionally entire scores, seems to be its potential and the flexibility of the coexistence with other dance or movement figures.²² In this spirit, movement becomes a component part of fixed choreographic structure having the form of a fixed movement and dance score. Recontextualisation may quickly turn into decontextualisation, when the presence of the original context is not renewed in the form of creating a new context, in an effort to picture, capture or review the "traditional" content, but rather space is set up for the creation of a new context containing several other contexts.²³

20 Partner dances which existed in the context of a concrete social event (a wedding, for instance) and were distinct by their clear structure, both in terms of form and content.

21 For instance, harvest or welcoming spring dances.

22 By potentiality and flexibility I mean the choreographer's individual idea of the final form, which in a choreographer's work changes the elements depending on their potential inside a dance part as well as within the overall expression of a concrete scene or production.

23 By that I refer to the staging practice of international dance groups in which mutual enrichment connected with the concrete performer's individuality is among the focal points of work which reflects their cultural context, education, and personalities. A clash of contexts appears to be a possible stimulus in contemporary dance creation. For more see COOLS, G. *Imaginative Bodies. Dialogues in Performance Practices. The Memory Is in the Body*. Amsterdam : Valiz, 2016, pp. 44 – 58.

Anton Lachký's reference to folk dance is inevitably connected with the choreographer's cultural identity and it is culturally anchored, although in a totally different form. Conscious work with the elements of traditional folk dance implemented by Lachký represents a pool of movement and dance register and at the same time manifests the process of the liberation of form from content.

"Heritage is a concept that comes close to tradition. Both have something to do with time and connections between yesterday, today and tomorrow. (...) At the same time we see them as two different processes, and behind them different meanings and results concerning dance. (...) Maybe contemporizing is a time concept pointing to something we do, in a new time, parallel to localizing that means that something is transferred in space and done in a new place."²⁴ The above quotation from a study by Swedish ethnologist Mats Nilsson may also be understood as alerting to identity, providing one admits that Anton Lachký's concept is about a continuous contact with the tradition. In an interview posted on YouTube Lachký maintains: "The identity colour that comes with what I do, probably the strong traditional influence how I started. The biggest part of the idea of Slovak dance would be joy. (...) Singing and dancing was the way how to make life easier. That would be one thing I try to keep in a specific way in the dance. Other things I like, of course, I like pushing powerful energy with the body."²⁵ Contemporary dance in Lachký's language of movement continues to implement the elements of traditional dance ridden of the historical and religious sediment of its realisation connected with specific events or facts.

Contemporary dance has evolved from a postmodern eclectic way of thinking, which made it possible to perceive dance which, in the words of the Czech dance theorist Nina Vangeli, "achieved two goals: freedom of expression and the precision of articulation of dance speech; it leaped over its development to a point where the ecstasy of wildness intersects with the ecstasy of discipline."²⁶ Both of these premises are uniquely present in Puzzle Work. Wildness is represented by constant movement, which looks to be free, however, thanks to its technical complexity and precision, it is subor-

24 NILSSON, M. *Dance, Gender and Meanings Contemporizing Traditional Dance*. Praha : AMU, 2012, p. 154.

25 Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ_6n4.

26 VANGELI, N. *Čítanka světové choreografie 20. století* [The 20th Century World Choreography Textbook]. Praha : Konzervatoř Duncan Centre, 2005, p. 24.

minated to discipline. Perfection in movement is one of the starting points. The physicality and precision of bodily expression seems to be the element facilitating progress. Anton Lachký maintains: “That’s the only way you can keep growing. If you succeed in a certain form, you must change the form, otherwise, there is nothing what you’re improving.”²⁷ For him, progress entails constant training and development of physicality, or rather the possibility of physical expression with an emphasis on precision and dynamics. Workshops and productions focus on performance, endurance, and constant movement, with BPM bordering on dark techno.

LUDUM

In 2012, Anton Lachký founded the dance group Anton Lachky Company, with dancers from all over the world. He devotes himself entirely to the choreographic work and during the eight years of the ensemble’s existence, he has prepared four full-length dance performances – *Mind the Gap* (2013), *Side Effects* (2015), *CARTOON* (2017), and *LUDUM* (2019). This was a time of his transition from primary electronic reproduced music to composers of classical and orchestral music (e.g., Antonio Vivaldi, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Ludwig van Beethoven). He used classical opus, specifically Giuseppe Verdi’s *Requiem*, for the first time during his collaboration with the Iceland Dance Company, for which he created the production *A Perfect Day to Dream* (2011): “I’ve never used classical music. This is my first encounter with music which is different from the one used in previous productions which was, let’s say, more dynamic. Not necessarily electronic but with a more abstract sound. I kept listening to Verdi’s *Requiem* for a year. It’s very powerful and there’s a lot of frailness in it, which allows me to use its potential in various ways.”²⁸

Verdi enabled Anton Lachký to expand the context of Puzzle Work and experiment not only in terms of bodily expression, but also in terms of music, which, unlike techno music, is more fragmented, sophisticated, and dramatic. *Requiem* has advanced Lachký to a more theatrical thinking: he no longer thinks only through the resulting movement material in the form of choreography, but in an effort to make the theme more concrete, he reaches

27 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFGjPCJ_6n4.

28 From an interview to the production *A Perfect Day to Dream*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBTklRULwGA>.

out for scores which are dramatic, rich in sounds, tempo and rhythm. Often, they are enriched by dramatic text outputs. Starting with the production *A Perfect Day to Dream*, Anton Lachký has put to use theatricalised dance expression in his full-length productions, largely through an exaggerated and intensified facial expression of the dancers.

In his most recent production *LUDUM*,²⁹ he focused on virtual reality and eliminating the boundaries between virtual and real. According to the production annotation, the dancers “wander in the wilderness of virtual reality. They enjoy an artificially created reproduction of reality and in glee they are drawn into a whirl in which even the wildest fantasies are possible. Genuine happiness is at your fingertips! The dancers are beautiful, strong, and immortal, their rapid movement is on the edge of the possible and reality pushes its limits to the horizon of infinity. Playing with the limits of the possible and the impossible to a point of eliminating the edges between them raises the question of what will become of Ludum and of its inhabitants? Are we still able to discern between reality and virtuality, the latter absorbing us more and more? Are we able to keep distance and maintain our sense of real life?”³⁰ Anton Lachký added a narrative line to the abstract theme, which frames the entire production. At the end, there is a direct interaction with the viewer. According to Slovak dance critic Barbara Brathová who reviewed the production, “(...) with the arrival of a bizarre couple evoking a snobbish married couple without taste (he is dressed up in a pink suit, cowboy boots and a hat, she is in a glittering evening gown), we get to understand that everything we have seen so far, is the creation of these ‘entrepreneurs’, of a computer programme that is, in which everyone is situated. (...) The protagonists change into puppets and turn into an implanted part of a computer game in which not only their dreams come true, but they are almost magically abducted by it. The couple even verbalises its amazement at this modern invention into the micro ports.”³¹

29 *LUDUM*. Anton Lachky Company, premiered on 2 April 2019 at the Theatre La Balsamine, Brussels. Choreography: Anton Lachký. Lighting and sound design: Tom Danielis. Costumes: Britt Angé. Cast: Angel Duran, Lewis Cooke, Patricia Rotondaro, Guilhem Chatir, Hyejin Lee, Anna Karenina Lambrechts, Ioulia Zacharaki, Maria Manoukian/Mami Izumi.

30 Annotation to production *LUDUM* staged during the main programme of the International Festival of Contemporary Dance Bratislava in Movement 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <https://www.plast.dance/podujatie.php?lang=sk&id=468>.

31 BRATHOVÁ, B. Ludum, mesto oklamanej pravdy [Ludum, the City Deceiving with Truth]. In www.tanecportal.sk, 13 October 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <http://www.tanecportal.sk/casopis/clanok/ludum-mesto-oklamanej-pravdy>.



Anton Lachky Company: LUDUM. The Theatre La Balsamine, Brussels, 2019. Choreography and direction Anton Lachký. Photo by Hichem Dahes.

Interpretation at the choreographic/dramaturgical level is replicated by associative notions of speed, effect, and flow of information. In the first half, the dancers seem to be copying information bits at an extremely dynamic pace, and choreographic patterns are suggestive of the information algorithms of the information movement on the Internet. The principle is revealed gradually. The production opens up by Anton Lachký's almost "Wilsonian" introduction of the dancers standing against the backdrop and performing short solos on the proscenium. The entrée is characterised by dynamic movement accentuating the dancers' physical limitations and plasticity. The production is a bright mix, musically and acoustically. In addition to shamanic drums, the sounds of classical music are transformed into electronic sound lines evocative of "analog techno."³² The sound element is not as augmented as in previous projects, whether it was techno or classical music, but it rather represents a relatively eclectic array of sounds. Through music, Anton Lachký tries to capture the birth and development of a civilisation, from shamanic drums through classical music, down to electronic music, which is reduced in *LUDUM* finale to sounds evocative of the signal sounds of machines, of their beeps, whistles, squeaks, and the like.

The Puzzle Work technique of composition is strongly represented in the performers' movement terminology. In the introduction, Anton Lachký deliberates two movement extremes – a standing dancer on the horizon versus a dancing dancer on the proscenium, while the spatial division allows the viewer to perceive the gap between passivity and activity. The dance extreme, augmented mostly to the dynamic position of the performers, is present in all of Lachký's Puzzle Work creation. A unique coherence is created by the body metaphor as a piece of information whose transmission speed determines time. For the greater part, the production is an information warfare, where exhibition³³ solos blend with duets, and the latter with group choreographies. The transitions are among the most powerful moments of the piece given the clear timing work and the plasticity of expression. It fluctuates and from an initially energetically binary position "tension and relaxation," it shifts from adagio through animato down to allegro vivace and prestissimo, which are Anton Lachký's most natural tempos.

32 These are modular synthesizers which are also used as digital beats.

33 By that I mean the exhibition of form expressed in exacting movement and dance parts in which the content constitutes a secondary, or tertiary even, layer.

In a relatively legible image, Anton Lachký presented the concept of social levelling, the process of controlling information and the desire of the elites for uniformity. The initially colourful and dynamic singularities of performers were transformed into machines repeating the same movement. The dance unisono continues until a final effort to interact with the audience is made, which may also lead to embarrassment and resentment. In it, Anton Lachký's cowboys tried to convey a virtual reality that is not real, but its power is dangerous. The epilogue was again an interactive dialogue between two dancers and the audience. Reviewer Barbara Brathová appreciated that "the dancers of Anton Lachky Company were convincing in communicating the message to the audience, dancing perfectly, with matter-of-fact professionalism and with an amusing authenticity of an attractively beautiful acting of the two main protagonists."³⁴

The dancers' creations may also be viewed from a different perspective. What the reviewer referred to as "attractively beautiful acting" was, in fact, the weakness of otherwise elaborate production. An effort to render their parts in a natural way had the opposite effect – as if their stylisation masked the dancers' inability to interpret the text in a civil, natural, and playful manner. Uncertainty in the interpretation of the text itself, which was supposed to be the gloss of the whole theme (as follows from the intent), draws attention to one of the weaknesses not only of *LUDUM*, but also of many other dance productions. Although the dividing line between acting and performing arts is thin, and one could talk about liminal nature, both art forms, whether it be performance art or performing arts, operate in a similar field of the viewer's perception. If the dancer's presence is flawless in bodily expression, the dancers are challenged with acting and textual elements. Nowadays, alongside dance skills, it is an essential part of the performers' predisposition. The strength of Anton Lachký's dancers in *LUDUM* lies in their bodily expression, so the qualitative difference in acting was even more noticeable. In the context of Lachký's full-length productions, this is a significant qualitative shift, despite some reservations. *LUDUM* is a production where Anton Lachký's Puzzle Work system coheres with the content. The speed of information transfer follows the dancers' movement and the production theme and utilised means converge on a relatively consistent form, which cannot be said of his previous productions, in which content was often diminished by form.

34 BRATHOVÁ, B. *Ludum, mesto oklamanej pravdy*. [Ludum, the City Deceiving with Truth]. In www.tanecportal.sk, 13 October 2019. [online]. [cit. 1 December 2020]. Available at: <http://www.tanecportal.sk/casopis/clanok/ludum-mesto-oklamanej-pravdy>.

Conclusion

The paradox of contemporary dance is returning to narration using means other than dance and movement. Working with the text and its interpretation is progressively making its way into dance art. The process comes natural to some creative professionals, and they are able to enrich the dance piece with it. Occasionally, untapped potential at basic levels is noticeable, mainly due to a lack of the acting training of the dancers. This manifests itself especially in the uncertainty, which then – as in the case of the analysed production *LUDUM* – leads to an expression in which natural (civil) acting is confused with stylisation, which accentuates the discrepancy between the original intent and the acting limits of the dancers. Other untapped potential of such productions are insufficient articulation and the absence of diction, oftentimes the argument being the authenticity of the narrative and performativity. In an attempt to make contact with the audiences and have them understand their creations, the dancers reach out for words and the text, which affects the quality of dance art and weakens the belief in the power of its natural communication. In a most refined way, the dancer's exposed body stands in contrast with working with the word and verbal expression.

The abstract language of contemporary dance does not necessarily rely on the support of monologues. Currently, the plasticity of the dancer's expression lies in his/her ability to deal with the word outside its inherent information value – that is, in the dancer's compelling alternation of verbal and dance expressions, thus expanding the register in interpreting the text and clearly crossing the line of physical expression.

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