



AT THE STILL POINT OF THE TURNING WORLD

PREMIERES 2018

Concept: Renaud Herbin
With the collaboration of Julie Nioche, Sir Alice and Aitor Sanz Juanes

At the Still Point of the Turning World is a performance piece at the crossroads of puppetry and dance. It first began with the encounter of Renaud Herbin and dancer-choreographer Julie Nioche around their shared interest for the suspended bodies. For this project, they have surrounded themselves with the writer-composer Sir Alice and the puppeteer Aitor Sanz Juanes. At the Still Point of the Turning World comes forth as a quartet.

Centre stage is occupied by a compact throng of little bags. Reminiscent of the storage spaces in which string puppets (marionettes) are wrapped and protected in textile, these small bodies are in suspension, as if frozen in the course of their existence. At the end of their long strings, they are creating an environment, a landscape become abstract. A marionette emerges from the crowd to roam the thick floor. It progressively becomes able to part with the floor, lifting off into motions of flight.

The manipulators' presence is in no way foreign to this experiment in separation from gravity. They themselves seem underlaid, manipulated, acted upon by external forces. The dancer takes part in this trio. The movements of living and inert bodies are answering to each other. Roles are fluctuating. The dance appears at the intersection and balance point in which one can no longer tell who is acting upon whom, who is acting ahead of another.

The visual dimension is supported by the sounds of Sir Alice. Whilst a prepared zither brings us closer to sounds of the stage, the sung voice embodies and amplifies this vertical world, somewhere between a lullaby and a lay prayer. Time itself oscillates between stillness (still point) and unrest (the turning world). A suspension between two worlds is occurring, that of the human with that of the material. An inquiry is sparked into the place of existence, of the individual and the collective.

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Concept : Renaud Herbin

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Performed by : Julie Nioche (alternately with Lisa Miramond) , Renaud Herbin,
Sir Alice et Aitor Sanz Juanes

Scenic Design : Mathias Baudry

Puppet : Paulo Duarte

Lighting: Fanny Bruschi

Construction: Christian Rachner

Stage Manager: Thomas Fehr

Touring Stage Manager : Olivier Fauvel

Produced by: TJP Centre Dramatique National de Strasbourg - Grand Est

Co-produced by :

Ljubljana Puppet Theatre

Maison de la Culture d'Amiens - Pôle européen de création et de production

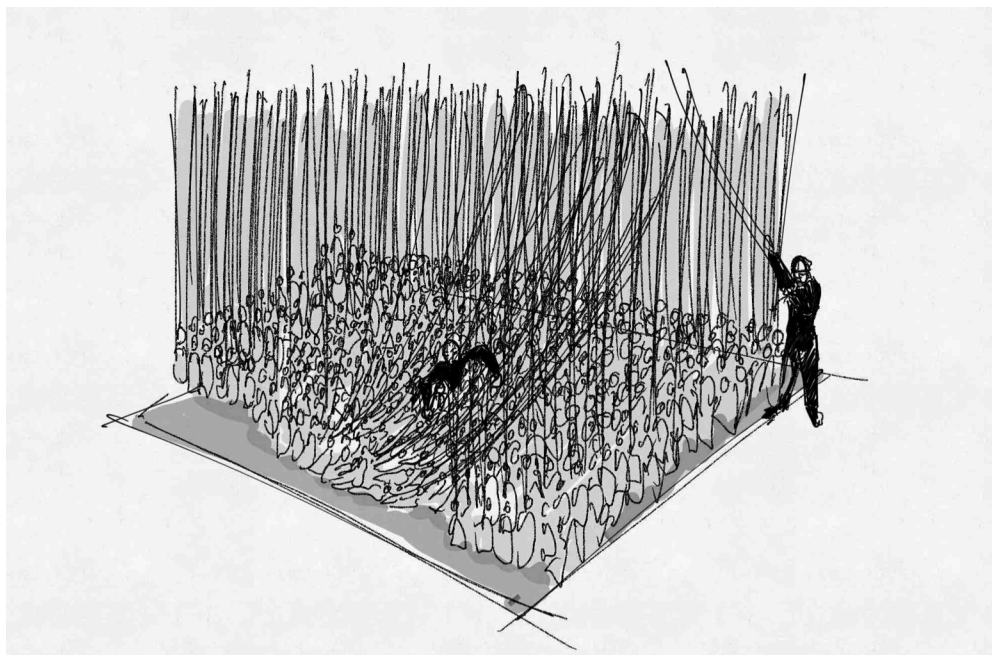
Théâtre de Sartrouville et des Yvelines - Centre dramatique national

« At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless ;
Neither from nor towards ; at the still point, there the dance is. »

TS. Eliot, Four Quartets

« Au point de quiétude du monde qui tournoie. Ni dans la chair ni désincarné ;
Ni provenance ni visée, au point de quiétude c'est là qu'est la danse. »

Traduction Claude Vigée



Sketch by Mathias Baudry

THE CROWD AS LANDSCAPE

A dancer, two puppeteers and a musician are at the edge of a throng of puppets stored in their bags and hanging from long strings. They form a compact, motionless community. Here is the image of time suspended: beings awaiting a becoming that no longer belongs to them. The course of their life is literally suspended.

This crowd is our humanity left to its own devices, as much as to the forces which it can no longer act upon. The spheres of influence and interaction can be felt. The crowd undulates. It has become an envelope for the performers' bodies present. The material which covers, erases or frames the bodies, feeds the inner worlds of the performers.

The forest of strings progressively sets itself into motion, drooping and rising. As a single body, the bags seem interdependent, each of them fastened to the same frame. Yet, in the swaying which the passing of these giant humans provokes, some of these figures register singular trajectories. The movement ripples with an aquatic quality. Undulations are drawn, making the flow of energies tangible; the secret ties, invisible to their eyes and yet physical, which conjoin all of these elements.

The living beings on stage emerge from the mass before becoming wrapped in it once again. At the scale of their perception, the crowd becomes landscape.



Photograph by Benoît Schump

A DANCE ENACTED BY INTERLAY OF MATERIALS

“It is a dance of the *intermediate*,
the puppet is no longer at the forefront but at the centre,
the nexus between two dancing bodies.”

Julie Nioche

Dance and puppetry seek to move one another. The material embodies the junction point between the dancer and the puppeteer's body. These bodies do not reveal they are dancing. They are made-to-dance (*Ils sont dansés*), for the motivation of the movement comes from elsewhere. Their form and their dynamics are the result of forces that are concrete and at times invisible. From here stems the ambiguity of not knowing, between the body and the material, which is following or extending the other.

Here is a dance where what is there to be seen takes place between bodies. These bodies assert their colours, their imaginaries, starting from the notion of relationality as bedrock. Stretches of living and inert bodies are becoming blurred : the place of encounter is enacted. Had they been separate, the elements wouldn't hold up. Each of them has their own specific story. Yet their vocabulary is being drawn from a common pool still in the making.

This is also a display of the body at work, underlying any storytelling or notion of character. What is of interest here is to reveal its physical properties.

ZITHER, VOCALS AND AMPLIFIED SOUNDS

Sir Alice's vocal and musical work nourishes and amplifies the dance, the impression of depth, as well as the discord of scales. The physical sounds of the stage are its primary resource : the sound of rubbing, of cracks and the meeting of materials.

The zither is the only instrument on stage. It supplies harmonic tones. Progressively, the breath of life, voice and song appear.

A slow transformation takes place, from a faint hum to an outcry : somewhere between lament and incantation, between an ardent and a silent plea. The insistence and the humility of the human voice emerges toward an outside, a beyond. A lay prayer arrests us.

REFRESHING PUPPETRY

With *At the Still Point of the Turning World*, Renaud Herbin has found the opportunity to further explore the possibilities of string puppets. He is updating the technique to put it at the service of contemporary writing in its encounter with the field of choreography.

The puppet exists here as query. It questions the body of living beings and easily transposes the vocabulary used by dancers. It defines itself as surface, tracing the spatial boundaries of an organism ; as volume, a balloon to fill with one's breath ; as the multiplicity of directions that joints enable. The puppet also has the specificity of eluding universal gravitation and singularly embodying the dynamic of suspension. The variety of scales of the stage come to meet : the throng of miniature beings becomes a giant organism when it is manipulated as a single body (a square with five-metre-long sides). The marionette of approximately one metre makes the connection between the little bags (approximately thirty centimetres) and the heights of the performers.

In this game in which roles overlap and are reversed - between the puppet, the puppeteers, the space and the dancer - the principles of manipulation are understood as a zone of interaction.



Photograph by : Benoit Schupp

IN MY BEGINNING IS MY END

« Since times have become “modern”,
being in the world has implied having to cling to the earth’s crust
and beg for gravity - beyond the lap and the envelope. »
Peter Sloterdijk, *Bulles, Sphères I*

The writing of the piece lies in the tension of that which stretches away from ground to reach toward airborne, in a search of verticality. The earthbound bodies confront themselves to the suspended bodies’ aerial dynamic.

All of these bodies on stage activate one another without their being able to discern who may be embodying the ghost or the shadow of the other. It is possible for them to mirror each other, to separate themselves into parts, to commence or complete a suggested movement. They intermingle, collapse, rise again. They appear, assemble, extend each other, multiply. Living and inert things incessantly exchange roles and positions.

The imaginary that pertains to the movement on stage consists in the search for the fragile place of existence, for the breath that animates it.

T.S. Eliot’s poem *Four Quartets* nourishes the dramaturgy of the performance: “Neither flesh nor fleshless ; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is.” In this uncertain space between living and inert, in a suspended temporality in which one cannot tell who is acting upon what, *there the dance is*.

The dance and puppetry thus offer an adventure of the body, in which the perpetual transformation of one form into another enables a transgression of thresholds. Neither living, nor inert, something is taking shape amidst the blurring of boundaries.

Parallel worlds are coexisting.

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Tour (in progress)

Premiere at Lutke Festival – Ljubljana (Slovenia) – 14 september 2018
La Filature – scène nationale de Mulhouse – 9 & 10 october 2018
TJP – centre dramatique national de Strasbourg – Grand Est – 16 to 21 october 2018
Théâtre de la Vignette – Montpellier – 28 & 29 november 2018
Maison de la Culture d'Amiens – 11 to 13 december 2018
Granit MA – scène nationale de Belfort – 16 januar 2019
Espace Malraux – scène nationale de Chambéry – 29 & 30 januar 2019
Théâtre de Sartrouville et des Yvelines - Centre dramatique national – 6 & 7 februar 2019
CCAM – scène nationale de Vandoeuvre-les-Nancy – 21 & 22 mars 2019
Biennale Internationale des Arts de la Marionnette de Paris – 3 to 5 mai 2019

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