



ELEANOR BAUER

A LOT OF MOVING PARTS

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DANCE | 75 MIN | IN ENGLISH



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NL Hoe denkt dans doorheen Eleanor Bauer en hoe denkt Eleanor Bauer doorheen dans? In deze solo brengt de Amerikaanse choreografe en performer Eleanor Bauer jaren van danspraktijk en -schriftuur samen. Ze gaat aan de slag met fricties, botsingen, vertalingen, liefdesverhoudingen en lacunes tussen dans en taal. Ze keert terug naar de etymologische betekenis van choreografie – het Griekse 'Chorea' (dans) en 'graphein' (schrijven) – en schrijft dans in bewegingen én in woorden. In het Zweeds zijn 'voelen' en 'weten' één en hetzelfde woord. Puur toeval, of poëtische gerechtigheid?

Sinds haar opleiding aan PARTS toonde Eleanor Bauer zowat al haar werk in het Kaaithheater. Van spitsvondige solo's tot ingenieus veelzijdige producties voor de grote zaal. Van 2013 tot 2016 was ze hier artist-in-residence. Daarna trok ze naar Stockholm voor een doctoraat in de choreografie. Dit seizoen toont ze ook de 'cyber a cappella Dataist opera' *New Joy* in de grote zaal, samen met haar partner in crime componist Chris Peck.

FR Comment la danse pense-t-elle à travers Eleanor Bauer et comment Eleanor Bauer pense-t-elle à travers la danse ? Dans ce solo, la chorégraphe et performeuse états-unienne Eleanor Bauer réunit des années de pratique et d'écriture de la danse. Elle se sert de frictions, de collisions, de traductions, de relations amoureuses et de lacunes entre la danse et la langue. Elle revient à la signification étymologique de la chorégraphie – le grec khorea (danse), et graphein (écriture) – et écrit la danse en mouvements et en mots. En Suédois, le même mot désigne « sentir » et « savoir ». Pur hasard ou justice poétique ?

Depuis sa formation à PARTS, Eleanor Bauer a présenté quasi l'ensemble de son œuvre au Kaaithheater. De solos subtils à d'ingénieuses productions variées pour la grande scène. De 2013 à 2016, elle était artiste en résidence au Kaaithheater. Puis, elle est partie à Stockholm préparer un doctorat en chorégraphie. Cette saison, dans la grande salle du Kaaithheater, Bauer et son complice, le compositeur Chris Peck, nous propose aussi le cyberopéra dataïste a cappella *New Joy*.

EN How does dance think through Eleanor Bauer and how does Eleanor Bauer think through dance? In this solo, the American choreographer and performer Eleanor Bauer embraces the particularity of dance-thought as synthetic, complex, change-oriented, fantastical, and multi-faceted. She works with the frictions, collisions, translations, love affairs and gaps between dance and language, unfolding the notion of choreography as dance-writing, physically and verbally. In Swedish, to feel and to know are the same verb: coincidence, or poetic justice?

Since completing her training at PARTS, Eleanor Bauer has presented almost all her work at Kaaithheater. They range from clever solos to ingeniously versatile productions for the main stage. Between 2013 and 2016, she was one of our artists-in-residence. She then moved to Stockholm to do a doctorate in choreography. This season, she is also presenting the 'cyber a cappella Dataist opera' *New Joy* on the main stage, along with her partner in crime composer Chris Peck.

AN ESSAY ON DANCE, ON ITS WAY

BY ELEANOR BAUER, NOVEMBER 2018- JANUARY 2019

We have a problem. No matter how much it is established and affirmed that no thought really exists in the head but rather in a profound set of relations between bodily systems, layers of flesh, and the environment, we still give disproportionate credit to our brains. No matter how much science insists that our decisions are made as much by thousands of bacteria inhabiting our guts if not more than by any illusion of free will, we still tend to think that we think for ourselves. No matter how much philosophy from the Feminists to the Deleuzians and beyond has agreed for decades that a sentient subject is not one but many, or that a body is a matrix of senses and sensibilities informed by myriad outsides and inhabited by several Others, our everyday language and culture is riddled with dualistic notions about mind and body, or spirit and matter, passed down through a very violent history of ideas in the West which do not help us to conceive of the vast set of relations that enable thought to occur. And so I would like to propose a new word, that we all put into use from this day forth, and that word is bind.

Bind, because body-mind is insufficient. Even if I make it one word, bodymind, and even if body comes first, we still hear body and then mind, a duality at best. We still hear and read two separate things, that register as two separate images or locations. Bind squishes the words together forcefully as it refers to being bound, bound inescapably in a vast set of relations. Whether it conjures notions of a pact, or chemistry as in chemical bonds, or bondage like ropes and kink, all metaphors will do and are equally useful. I propose therefore we shall heretofore no longer say “body” and no longer say “mind” – as neither exist. They are both fictive notions, abstractions of what is. What exists, in reality, is the bind, always bound up in several relations which it thinks through constantly. When the bind thinks through these relations in an aesthetic and attentively skilled manner, that is what I call dancing.

Dancing is a form of thinking, but it is not thinking about anything. Dance is not about anything, for then we are in pantomime, or theater, or representation. Even indigenous dances, traditional folk dances, and story ballets that conjure, resemble, or represent things or animals or spirits become something else once danced. The dance-thought of the thing is not one-to-one. To be a conduit and to be a representative or a referent are all very different things. As a conduit, as a medium, dancing is an activity that forges connections and conjures meanings that are not-indexical, or rather, connect to so many possible points of inference that dance always generates surplus meanings and affects that exceed any possible intention for a single meaning. Dance moves beyond the outlines of any image, dance floods ideas with irreducible experience. In this way, dance thinks but it

does not think about, it thinks through, in vectors, and usually many at once.

Dance thinks from here to there and from there to here, from me to you and from you to me, from human to non-human and from non-human to human, from outside to inside and from inside to outside, from order to chaos and from chaos to order, from subject to object and from object to subject, from the invisible to the visible and from the visible to the invisible, from potential to actual and from actual to potential, dance thinks through and along intensive relations. Dance makes relations themselves into material, and along tenuous lines, with its talent for ambiguity, dance enlivens the spaces between that which it relates with all sorts of expressions that are neither here nor there, me nor you, past nor future, inside nor outside, neither totally chaotic nor purely ordered, neither completely human nor completely non-human, neither completely visible nor completely invisible. In this way dance does not express things but relations, for in movement, dance has no other choice than to be constantly on its way.

The dance is not me and it is not mine. Always an intimate alien, demanding of observation but fleeting from full grasp, I have to feel it to know it, and it needs a sentient material, such as a bind, in order to exist and be experienced, but dance is always something other than the experiences it renders sensible. Dance runs away, but not so fast. It hangs around, but not too long. Dance is insistently ambient, seeping through layers of flesh and leaking out again into the surroundings. It gets stored in memory but memory corrupts, so it always needs to be shaken up again.

My body is a dirty container – everything that passes through and over it leaves its trace. Dancing is shaking that dirty container to see what falls out. It's not always surprising, or necessarily likeable, a lot of old stories and familiar rhythms in there, but with a little humor and friendly dis-identification, any old thing can be worth attention and study. As my friend and colleague Manon Santkin says "the dancer is a giver of attention." Attention turns whatever movement into something called dance. Attention is the tool with which a dancer crafts. At the blurry edges of what dance is or isn't lies the question of what's being given attention.

Choreography has always been about mourning and resisting dance's disappearance. Trying to create repeatable acts out of something that's always already gone, constructing conditions for a dance's becoming-consistent, be it notation, or imitation, or formal techniques. But dance doesn't necessarily care that much for its own maintenance. Dance

is raw drive plus social vibe, and while it needs structures to resist and make visible and push up against and slide out of, it doesn't care for those structures' consistency any more than it thinks of its own preservation. Dance is kamikaze, zen, and punk. It doesn't mind disappearing. Dance trusts, however selfishly, that what's important will stick, to the bones, to the flesh, to the impressions of memory. Disciplined dancers toil to keep certain memories alive.

Dance develops taste. Dance makes dancers work for its appreciation, by demanding that all the senses be infinitely sharpened in order to feel and render its forms sensible. Dance trains the capacity to taste, regardless of taste judgements. Dance is a practice of empathy with a thing that's not yet there. Dance is a practice of making sense, with all of the senses. Super-skilled like über-skilled dancers can make any form feel understood. And that skill most definitely includes style.

Style is not the same thing as taste. Style is aesthetic literacy, that comes with developing a lot of different tastes in a certain medium. Style is absolutely medium-specific and un-translatable. Fashion style is really not the same thing at all as dance style or writing style or lifestyle. Style does not translate directly between media. Styles get grouped into cultural trends, but the mechanics of a style in any medium remains utterly idiomatic, absolutely bound to the material in which it operates. Style is the accumulation of the language of others, without citation. Sometimes it's very obvious when someone is copying someone else's style. Most of the time it's messy and mixed and indirect. Style is everything besides the citation, it's the density of culture, the aura around what has been absorbed in repetition.

Dance operates heavily in style. Dance can bear an immense accumulation of experiences without location, without names and places and faces. So much gets churned up in the turbulence of dancing without anyone knowing where it came from. So many people get mentioned by dance without meaning to refer. So much sticks to the bind without being curated or chosen, mixed in with the affinities and the chosen stuff, all that learned movement gets condensed into a thick material that is felt, tactile, manipulable, transferrable, and comprehensible as style. Style is the elusive whole that is more than the sum of its parts, and dance is thick with style.

In the chaotic opacity of what sticks, dancers and dance-makers can be very irresponsible for their history. It's not easy to pin down where a thing came from, much less who made

it up. Fame is a credit-magnet, but it's not very precise or accurate. All the people in the room, physically and virtually plus the weather that day and whatever was for lunch don't tend to appear in the credits. But real dance history does not give up. Dance History is a persistent ghost that troubles, haunts, possesses and dreams, because the official word has not sufficed. The narratives are reductive, the stories are partial and somewhat true, but the way that things really came to be, the way that things pass from body to body and from genre to genre towards novel mixtures and curious combinations is more like odor or sex or compost, and they all leave their cryptic traces.

While many somatic techniques pride themselves in the ability to alter the bind's habits, the bind has a bind of its own that is operatively a black box of mysteries where all the senses and sensibilities make the sense they want to make and it's intentionally meaningless like life is meaningless and like a river is meaningless. Patterns, habits, notions, stories, memories, the new and the old, the familiar and unfamiliar, all jitter and tumble against each other unpredictably in the darkness along a wide and vague gutter between affect and cognition, between nonsense and sense, between the felt sense and meaning.

Let's be very clear: abstraction and dance have absolutely nothing to do with each other. If dance cannot be about anything, that doesn't mean it's abstract either. Dance is never abstract. There is absolutely nothing pure and clean about dance, nothing extractable as "dance" which is not the entire unholy mess of dancing. Choreography is capable of abstraction, and the whole western history of choreography since that word's first inscription is born from and dominated by a brutal abstraction of space, but dance does not abstract anything nor anyone. As the bind binds it's own business, it binds a million relations of significance, always and inescapably particular. Any precise dance is always a specificity that escapes reduction to a category or type, too full of affects, quirks, and idiosyncrasies to be generic, and too generative of slippery meanings to be reduced to model that resists or contains the excessive flood. Dance cannot be abstract because it also cannot be about, so it does not have to distance itself from anything it is not about in order to move towards abstraction. It's concerns and logics are completely otherwise.

So how can we talk about dance, and how can we write dance? How can we literally choreo-graph as in dance-write? Where do language and dance meet, if at all? Language itself functions in reference, signification. Language is total aboutness, which is useful so that we can talk about things that exist when they are not in front of us. With the advent

of writing and writing tools came the possibility of abstraction. With writing, language could be distanced even further from the event. The more a culture drifts from oral to technological, the more abstraction is enabled. So if the very foundation of language is aboutness and the vanishing point of writing is abstraction, and if dance does not function in terms of aboutness nor abstraction, then written language and dance are in for a lot of misunderstandings, power struggles, and friction. It's a perfect romance.

When we recognize the consciousness of flesh and the power of things in shaping us and speaking to us, as we think through and with our environment, as we learn to dance through receptive skills that precede and inform our active skills, there is another word we need besides bind. And that word is Sobject. Neither subject nor object. Under and before both, like *sous* in French, sobject lies dormant within both subject and object performance roles, supporting their coming to appear in relation to other things as the active subject or the "suffering object" (as french grammar would have it). Everything is sobject, primordial sobject, waiting for the great play of power-gazes and moves to unfold and determine, only temporarily, beings from things, doers from done-to's, all of which falls apart in the flux of vital forces and changes, and that is what dance knows best of all. Dance is pure sobjectivity.

But there is nothing natural or given about dance. It is culture, learned and imposed, carved and offered, viral pathways through which the libidinous and curious drives of a bind as needy to move as a toddler's are realized. The reflexive fleshy sobject of the bind cannot forget what it knows, what it has seen and heard and felt, and however innocent the drives may feel, they express themselves in learned ways. The helplessly self-observing but ultimately opaque sobject of the bind naturalizes, habituates, and continually blurs culture into nature.

Of course all of what I say is just the best I can do with what I've experienced, a deeply considered rumination thoroughly informed by my own practice, and while I speak with conviction and sometimes brash poetic license, this is just a shot in the dark, because truly, nobody really knows. How bind thinks can never be fully revealed to itself. The intentionality of the senses makes it such that we see with our eyes and hear with our ears, but we cannot see our eyes or hear our ears. It is the same with thought as with perception: it is difficult to think thought. Dance-thought, as it is so utterly sensual, is especially recessive from the senses. We can think within and

through language, but we cannot think language itself. It is impossible to fully sense or observe the functioning of the systems we think with and through. Hence the challenge of meditation: the mind is a lot of smoke and mirrors. And yes, neuroscience also has a very long way to go. So while I would like to build up some notions around what dance-thought is, I cannot pull the dance thinking out of my bind and look at it from a distance. In the darkness of layers of flesh that thinks, we still don't really know how or why precisely thoughts arise, but the bind does it, effortlessly, insistently, and without our tending. Despite the intermittent awareness of struggle to absorb new information, most learning is hidden, naturalized and assumed by the bind. Hence the occasionally natural taste of culture.

CREDITS

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