

A Giant X On ImPulsTanz- Vienna International Dance Festival 2016

By Alan
Smithee

By Michaela Preiner

VIENNA, AUG. 16 - A giant X was the logo of a special workshop series held at the ImPulsTanz Festival in Vienna. This year, the directors of ImPulsTanz had the amazing idea to invite an artist to conceive of a giant workshop in which visual art and dance could flow together. This artist was Tino Sehgal, who in fact is not only an artist who influences visual artists around the world, but he also studied choreography and influences performance art. One could describe him as the personification of visual art and dance in one person.

Together with Louise Höjer, who has been working with Sehgal for 10 years, and Rio Rützing, the director of the workshop series, Sehgal curated a series of 38 workshops involving two teachers per workshop, one who works in the visual arts as, for example, an artist *, theorist or museum director, the other a dancer, choreographer or someone who works in the field of theatre. Because of the team's global network they managed to attract renowned experts in the field of art and performance. This guaranteed that the workshop participants were exposed to a huge amount of ideas not only from one specific sphere of art.

One of the workshops, titled *Amputationstanz* was remarkable. The artists Julia Rublow and Wolfgang Ganter had the idea to cast the legs and arms of the workshop participants in plaster to create a collective situation in which everyone involved could only produce art by helping each other. The planned presentation at the end of the workshop, which would have been a wonderful source for images of the participants, all of them with plastered extremities, did not happen as there was protest due to the heat on the second day. Instead, they decided to go to a beautiful beach on the Danube river to swim and get rid of the plaster. "But for the first time in my life I learned to think differently about art," Raviel, a dance student from Israel,

explained. This is one of many similar statements given by the participants.

Other teams like the artist Maria Hassabi and the gallerist Jan Mot, the director Tom Stromberg and museum director Klaus Biesenbach or the performer Rirkrit Tiravanija and the dramaturg Peter Stamer, amongst others, pushed all limits. They gave not only information about their own work but also a lot of creative input. Some of the workshops concluded with short presentations by the participants. No matter which approach the leading teams chose, no matter if their goal was achieved or not – all participants felt like doors opened for them. Doors which they did not even know existed. During the four weeks Vienna was indeed a city in which the ideas of cross-over and interdisciplinary work in different fields of art was not only presented but also experienced. A fact which will definitely have an impact on future art productions.

Looking at the history of performance art, which was established in Europe – especially in Vienna – and in the United States during the 1960s – with a tiny glow at the beginning of the 20th century in the DADA movement as well as later in the works of Joseph Beuys – it is evident that performance art was originally developed by visual artists, with a few exceptions. And, more significantly, this art form did not in fact really influence a great number of dancers or choreographers. Their field was a more or less a hermetic bubble in which visual artists only helped from time to time create scenography for the performances. After this Viennese summer the bubble has definitely popped.

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* **Mario Garcia Torres and Joachim Koester** were amongst the artists invited by **Tino Sehgal** and his team to give a workshop at ImPulsTanz. See also text by **Alan Smithee** on this page.

1. At dawn

(Reflections on the visual art x dance workshop *this is how we kill time* with Mario García Torres and Maria Francesca Scaroni...)

We danced naked the dance of the dead, or rather we witnessed this flying of angels over a graveyard of broken prayers, the souls of our feet aching for forgiveness, for release, begging the unknown path.

To walk into and again another time, into and again we repeat this and coming and again standing still and up becoming this other time. Just this one now – at dawn:

2. This is how we kill time:

What we did...

If you've seen the movie *My Dinner with Andre* you'll know what I mean. If you haven't, now is the time. Andre's monologue about dancing naked in a Polish forest with 40 Jews who play harps and finally baptise him before burying him alive pretty much sums it up.

We danced and we stood still, we saw the sunrise and we walked (and we walked and we walked and we walked). Then we slept together in the dark of the day and in between we performed at the exhibition, "Alan Smithee, A Retrospective" curated by choreographer and dancer Maria Francesca Scaroni and visited by an impressive public of us. The exhibition was preceded by an intimate private reading of *I am not a Flopper*, by Mario García Torres performed by Alan Smithee himself (if you don't know who I am, you absolutely must look me up).

We discussed the dynamics of ownership, power and control between dancers and choreographers, students and teachers, artists, curators and the market. How does Art manage to find any freedom within The System, without selling its soul, without losing the artist in the midst? Is there a way through to the essence of art as an act of creation?

this is how we kill time was a more or less successful (at least genuine) attempt to achieve an actual Event: an aesthetic experience of being for the sake of creation. It was a wild throwing out of whatever we could come up with in order to do something – anything – to shake it up.

And although it was not a novel pursuit, it was at least noble in its assumption that we obviously did not know what that something might be. And, finally, it was a collection of ephemeral moments of Art for Art's sake, unadvertised, un-bought and unsold.

3. And let's not forget the importance of the slow quiet moments that reverberate through time but go unnoticed in the moment

With Maria and Jan: (another workshop) For example, there was the *Walking Slowly to the Belvedere* moment – a moment stretched in time with 20 artists and Jan Mot silently following choreographer Maria Hassabi in a cluster – speeding up, slowing down and sometimes stopping in the middle of the street. This was an exercise in understanding rhythm, pace and movement in space, but to the casual onlooker it was a disruption of the dispositive that offered a curious break. Like *this is how we kill time*, it became a performance existing for its own sake, this time performed by both walkers and onlookers together out of mutual interest.

Slowly Sliding Down the Stairs at the Leopold was a spontaneous unexpected performance by Alan Smithee in which we spent half an hour bruising our backs on the stairs at the Leopold Museum. The guards asked us if we had permission to do this and informed us that the stairwell was a fire escape. We would have to leave. But our persistence made it clear to the museum visitors, who seemed to understand this intuitively, that the event was actually a performance. None of us seemed to mind that there was no label on the wall.

The workshop *With Maria and Jan* was discourse, not through spoken conversation but in rhythm and the moving body in time and space and through the glance and the gaze. For three days we visited museums *moving* our discourse through spaces designed for other things – for still things – for museum things, for things that required looking. This is how the dancers were asked to be in the museum. We were asked to reflect through lonely contemplations discovered in the stillness of our own thoughts and then to record them in writing. And somehow this restraint – to write and not to talk, and not to move – brought about unexpected logics.

4. Conclusion

What is an unexpected logic? It is one that is not quite sure what it has to do with what came before and what comes after,

with the 1960s and 1970s for example, with *My Dinner with Andre*, with cell phones, queer politics, techno music and the elite brand-name marking of young dancing bodies – with anything goes. I haven't mentioned these yet but they were all there too – around the edges and framing the workshops within the context of the festival. But *that* analyses will have to be made by someone a little farther away from the source than me: someone a little younger, older, more straight, more queer, a dancer, a visual artist, a philosopher, a poet, a critic, a lover. For now I will just finish this perhaps somewhat lazy conclusion by asking if it might have something

to do with a relevance (don't bother looking it up – I made it up, up up – I hope we are all going up). And it is very contemporary to just do it and hope something happens.

Sometimes it does.



VIENNA, AUG. 5 - Participants of the *With Maria and Jan* workshop sliding down the stairs of the Leopold Museum during a spontaneous, fast-forward transformation of *PLASTIC* – a live installation work by Maria Hassabi, exhibited originally at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and most recently in February–March this year at MoMA, New York.



Francis Aljés, YAZD, Iran, 2006, oil and earth on wood, 14 x 19 cm

[Painting landscapes and cityscapes] is easy to do because it doesn't require any imagination. We share the same immediate present. I take position in front of a potential scene, at a safe distance yet close enough to feel fully immersed in the scenery. To be exact, what I'm fully immersed in is the perception of my persona in front of the scene. By myself — how do I feel? And by the others — how am I being perceived by the people who inhabit the scene I am painting? What is it that they see? Me watching them; the verso of my canvas; and if they go around my shoulder, the scene they were playing a part in a minute ago. And what do I search for when I look at these paintings later on? The memory of how I was feeling back then, planted on the recto side of my canvas, and the perception of my self by the others, with this thin painted cardboard separating us.

Francis Aljés, Notebook London, UK, November 2007.

Francis Aljés, Sven Augustijnen and Manon de Boer are participating in the Taipei Biennial entitled *Gestures and Archives of the Present, Genealogies of the Future* (10/09/16-05/02/17).

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A Report from New York

By Jacob King

BROOKLYN, AUG 15 - As I sit down to write this text, New York is at its tortuous summer extreme – the temperature outside is 97 degrees Fahrenheit (36 degrees Celsius for the international readers), factoring in the humidity, this makes for a heat index of 112. There is not a lot do here in this weather; the subway platforms turn into saunas, and the lucky ones leave for the beach or countryside, or stay inside with a good air conditioner. I've spent the last few days in museums.

In a fortuitous coincidence, this summer the Whitney, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art were all presenting major photography shows. I went to the Whitney first, having eagerly anticipated the Danny Lyon exhibition which opened there in June. With the exception of “The Destruction of Lower Manhattan” — his famous series of photographs documenting the evacuation and demolition of a swath of downtown to make way for the World Trade Center — most of Lyon’s work was unknown to me, and the Whitney show, a broad retrospective of Lyon’s photographs and videos, came as a revelation. Extremely restless with his subject matter, within a short period in the 1960s, Lyon produced an extraordinary series of images of the American Civil Rights movement, travelling across the south as a photographer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; shot a diary of his life on the road with the Chicago Outlaws motorcycle gang; photographed the lives of prisoners in rural West Texas; recorded the razing of Lower Manhattan (in 1966-1967); and documented various charismatic outsiders (including a Tattoo artist in Houston and a transgender woman named Pumpkin Renee.) Later photographs show Mexican immigrants who Lyon befriended in the 1970s while living in New Mexico, laborers in China’s Shanxi province, and, at the end of the show, Occupy Wall Street protesters. The timeliness of Lyon’s early work is uncanny — police violence against black people, immigration, transgender rights, and prison reform are among the hottest political issues right now in the US — and his photographs are remarkable for the ways they convey both the emotional complexity of their subjects, and the (often brutal) political discord that lies behind what is

pictured. The prison images elicit a combination of erotic desire (beautiful shirtless men lifting weights) and despair (will this man spend the next 40 years locked in this small cell?), and generate a certain political message: the photos of black inmates working in the cotton fields, with the prison marshals lording over them on horses, resemble images of the antebellum South (intimating, of course, a relationship between slavery and the insanely high number of black men who are incarcerated today in the US.)

Next was a trip uptown to the Met, which was presenting photographs by one of the medium’s biggest stars, Dianne Arbus. But rather than foregrounding the square photographs from the 1960s for which she is so famous, this show presented the “unseen” Arbus: largely, a trove of 35mm photos shot between 1957 and 1962, which were gifted to the Met in 2007. Hung on small freestanding walls in the museum’s new Breuer building (formerly the Whitney), these prints look nothing like the Arbus work that I would recognize and expect to see; grainy and often unremarkable, they are small images showing things like movie screens, carnivals, wax figures in a museum, or people on the street. They were presented here as premonitions of what was to come — the show was called *Diane Arbus: In the Beginning* — and the experience of looking was one of constantly trying to anticipate, retroactively, how Arbus’ “mature” photographs emerged from these images (a direct comparison that was made possible by the installation, in a side gallery, of Arbus’ famous “Box of 10” — a group of the large, square photos printed in 1970.) Looking through the hundred or so photographs in the show, you could see her subjects emerging, even if her methods of photographing them changed as she switched to a sharper format. There were snapshots here of a midget at home sweeping her kitchen, a transgender woman (called a “female impersonator”), assorted carnival personalities (a clown, a fire eater, and Ronald “the human pin-cushion”), as well as an image of a boy in the park with a toy gun (overheard while standing in front of this photograph: “He looks like a future Trump supporter.”) Also noticeable was a certain way Arbus has of isolating her subjects — whether a woman on the sidewalk in a mink stole, or a teenage usher working in the lobby

of a movie theatre; as they look back at her, they seem estranged from their surroundings, momentarily lost; and even things which in the situation might appear unremarkable (e.g. the uniformed coat of the usher, with its big tassels and buttons) look strange. In her iconic images, it is sometimes the most “normal” things — a Christmas tree in the living room of a prefabricated house in Levittown, a suburban couple sunbathing on the lawn — that appear the most bizarre.

The third major photography show of the summer (and the one which seems to have attracted the most popular attention) was a large-scale installation of Nan Goldin’s *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* at MoMA, in the galleries just off the museum’s main atrium. To be candid, I have never been a huge fan of Goldin’s photographs, which often seem to me to lack the technical perfection of, for instance, Peter Hujar or William Eggleston, while her subjects were nowhere near as fascinating as Arbus’. And there is something clichéd about the signs of bohemia (drugs, sex, tattoos), something which feeds a certain nostalgia for the 1970s and 80s, to which the current, post-Giuliani, post-Bloomberg New York seems particularly susceptible. But the presentation at MoMA was moving. What I had not realized upon seeing individual photographs over the years was the scale and the ambition of Goldin’s project, which is really an archive: its 700+ images document a decade of people, friendships, sex, parties, places — a scene. The poignancy (and melancholy) of this archive has only increased with time, as so many of the people depicted here — Greer Lankton, Mark Morrisroe, Peter Hujar, Keith Haring — did not survive the period.

The show at MoMA opened with a wall of posters — some handwritten, some printed, some Xeroxed with taped-on photographs — advertising showings of “A slideshow by Nan Goldin” at various venues in the 1980s, including the Collective for Living Cinema, OP Screen, the Pyramid Club, and at the Institute of Contemporary Art (the “First London Performances on June 20-24 1989”). What these materials made clear (and what I had not previously understood) was that before it was an “installation” in a museum, the *Ballad* was a performance, like a slideshow of a family vacation: you would come at such-and-such a time, to see Nan

In Brief

Jacob King will write for the gallery's newspaper a short series of texts in the form of 'reports' from different locations. His first contribution is on page 5.

Manon de Boer's film *one, two, many* was acquired by the CNAP (Centre national des arts plastiques) in Paris. This work premiered at DOCUMENTA (13) in 2012.

During the upcoming season curator and editor Tom Engels will present a short series of 4 evenings at the gallery with a live program. More in the next issue of the gallery's newspaper.

The opening of the show with **Joachim Koester's** and Stefan A. Pederson's sound pieces takes place during the Brussels Gallery Weekend. The exhibition is organised in collaboration with Maniera who will also present one sound piece in their gallery, place de la Justice 27-28 in Brussels. Thanks to Maniera and to Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Deurle (BE) for making it possible to include the daybeds by Belgian architect Juliaan Lampens.

<http://brusselsgalleryweekend.com>

Agenda

Francis Alÿs

Una historia de negociación, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 08/04 - 12/09 (solo); *The Fabiola Project*, Menil Collection, Houston (US), 21/05 - 28/01 (solo); *Embracing the Contemporary: The Keith L. and Katherine Sachs Collection*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (US), 28/06 - 05/09; *Getting Across*, Goethe Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi (IN), 01/09 - 01/12; *32nd Biennial de São Paulo: Incerteza viva/Live Uncertainty*, Cicillo Matarazzo Pavilion, São Paulo (BR), 10/09 - 11/12; *Gestures and Archives of the Present*, *Genealogies of the Future*, Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan, Taiwan, 10/09 - 05/02; *SIART, Bienal Internacional de Arte*, La Paz (BO), 10/10 - 11/11; *Francis Alÿs*, Secession, Vienna, 18/11 - 22/01 (solo); *Una historia de negociación*, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (CA), 01/12 - 09/04 (solo)

Sven Augustijnen

Cher(e)s Ami(e)s : Hommage aux donateurs des collections contemporaines, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 23/03 - 06/02; *Réponse*, Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides, Saint-Jérôme (CA), 31/08 - 06/11; *Spectres*, Irish Film Institute, Dublin, 06/09 (screening); *The Metronome Burst of Automatic Fire Seep Through the Dawn Mist Like Muffled Drums and We Know It for What It Is*, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin, 08/09 - 22/01 (solo); *Le Réduit*, la loge, Brussels, 08/09 - 19/11 (solo); *Gestures and Archives of the Present*, *Genealogies of the Future*, Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Arts Museum of Taiwan, 10/09 - 05/02; *The Unfinished Conversation: Encoding/Decoding*, Museu Coleção Berardo, Lisbon, 21/09 - 01/01; *Spectres*, Cinema ZUID, Antwerp (BE), 29/09 (screening); CRAC Alsace, Altkirch (FR), 16/10 - 15/01; *STEP UP! Belgian Dance and Performance on Camera 1970-2000*, Argos Centre for Art and Media, Brussels, 02/11 - 27/11; *Spectres*, Cinematek, Brussels, 13/11 (screening)

Pierre Bismuth

Timezone, Christine König Galerie, Vienna, 09/09 - 15/10; *Wall to Wall. Carpets by Artists*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland (US),

(advertisement)

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