

shift...centre...
creation 2005 - 2007

choreography
opiyo okach

scenography
j-c lanquetin

media artist collective
ingridmwangi
roberthutter

sound creation
thomas lucas

sculpture
polska

'The danger that recurs today is that the centre should be situated in one place; a place that holds monopoly of truth, a place that proscribes right or wrong, a place that determines good from bad... *Shift...Centre...* is not just a statement on the aesthetics of space, it is also about political and social reality. The centre is not just in one place.... we live with tradition on one side and on the other side Islam, Christianity, MTV...it's not an extraordinary thing to speak four languages, live four different cultures as everyday reality. It makes it natural to accept reality as multiple, truth depends on where you stand...

In the current 'war of ideas' I wonder if in our culture of performance we are not protagonist to the tyranny of perception.'
Opiyo Okach

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coproduction :

Ford Foundation – Nairobi, Les Franco-phonies en Limousin, “Ville de Limoges - Centres culturels - Scène conventionnée pour la danse”, Centre Chorégraphique National d’Orléans dans le cadre de « l’accueil -studio » Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication

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Series 1 Nairobi July 2005 (Choreographic Encounters Nairobi)

Choreography for 8 dancers and 2 singers

Series 2 Limoges September 2005 (Les Francophonies en Limousin)

Choreography for 7 dancers and 1 musician

Series 3 Orléans/Caen December 2005 (CCN Caen & Orleans)

Choreography for 4 dancers and 1 musician

Invited artists: Faustin Linyekula, Seydou Boro, Salia Sanou, Aïcha Mbarek, Hafiz Dhaou

Series 4 Paris April 2006 ((Danse L'Afrique Danse - Theatre de la Cite Internationale)

Choreography for 6 dancers and 1 musician

Invited artist: Moeketsi Koena

Series 5 Joburg-Durban-Maputo August-September 2006 (New Dance Festival, Jomba Dance Experience, Festival International de Dança Contemporanea)

Choreography for 5 dancers and invited artists*

Performance Series 2007

- Escena Contemporanea - Madrid, February
- La Fiencerie, Creil France, April
- Nouvelles Strasbourg Danse, May
- Plateforme Danse Bastia, May
- Encoding Identities Nairobi, September

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Draft Work - Ramoma Art Gallery Nairobi 2004

Following a series of workshops with Kenyan dancers in Nairobi the first draft of the project was presented as a trio for dancers (Lailah Masiga, James Mweu & Opiyo Okach) using the context of an art exhibition at Ramoma art gallery in Nairobi in 2004.

Creation Residencies 2005

Godown Arts Centre Nairobi, Francophonies en Limousin, Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orleans

In 2005 Opiyo Okach worked with the scenographer Jean-Christophe Lanquetin, lighting designer Chris Duplech, sculptor Polska, 12 dancers and 2 singers to develop an autonomous spatial framework of the piece at the Godown Arts Centre in Nairobi. The core group of shift dancers - shifters - was determined during this residency. They are: Emmanuel Grivet, Kefa Oiro, Lailah Masiga, Moturi Kebaya, Mani Asumani & Opiyo Okach.

Performance Series 2005/6

This stage of the creation has been developed over a series of public presentations:

series 1 (Encoding Identities - Godown Arts Centre Nairobi),

series 2 (Francophonies en Limousin - Limoges),

series 3 (Festival Traverses - Centre Chorégraphique National d'Orleans & Festival Danse d'Ailleurs - Centre Chorégraphique National de Caen),

series 4 (Danse en Creation - Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien - Theatre de la Cité International)

Each presentation in the series is shaped by the the unique characteristics of the performance space, the combination of performers and intervening artistic collaborators. During series 2 in Limoges the composer Thomas Lucas of La Boitblanche was invited to create the musical soundscape. For series 3 at Cean the dancers/choreographers Faustin Linyekula, Seydou Boro, Salia Sanou, Aïcha Mbarek & Hafiz Thaou were invited into the performance. At series 4 in Paris Moeketsi Koena, South African dancer/choreographer, was the invited artist.

In 2006 future series in this phase of the creation include: Series 5 (New Dance Festival - Johannesburg, Jomba Dance Festival - Durban, Festival de Dança Contemporanea - Maputo, Mez de Dança - Seville and Dialogue des Corps - Ouagadougou).

Creation Residency 2006 - L'Animal l'esquena, Spain

In October 2006 Opiyo Okach will be in residency at L'Animal l'esquena with the media artist collective IngridMwangiRobertHutter to work on initial exploration towards new collaboration. IngridMwangiRobertHutter work with live performance and video image. They will lay the framework for the video component in 'shift...centre...'.

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Shift...Centre... is an evolutive and moduable performance framework conceived by Opiyo Okach. Integrating public presentation into the creative process it dispenses with a number of the physical, spatial as well dramaturgic approaches of conventional presentation. It is conceived as an open structure to which Opiyo invites different creative collaborators (composers, scenographers, video artists...) as well as performers (dancers, musicians...).



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Corporeality of crossed culture space:

In 'shift...centre', as in previous work, I'm interested in the fabric of crossed cultural space as conceptual framework for choreographic inquiry; the unique ways of being and notions of identity shaped by conflict and contradiction, the wealth and diversity of viewpoints intrinsic to such spaces.

How does crossed culture context play on notions of corporeity, place and belonging: perception of physical and visual space.

'...why limit ourselves to one when there are 360° possible' - Zaha Hadid, architect

I'm intrigued at the implication of this architectural concern in cultural and social terms and how it relates to, for instance, 'axis of evil' or 'social cohesion' discourses such as:

'you are either with us or the enemy' - Bush

'the question today is not of the liberty of conscience but rather of public order' - Stasi report

and their parallels in terms of the structures and modes of presentation and perception in dominant performance culture. The first and later two quotes above represent divergent positions of engagement. The later two have provoked widespread outrage and shock yet paradoxically patterns of them seem ingrained and accepted as norms of function in our liberal democratic structures.

To cross divergent viewpoints and experiences I've chosen to work with artists of differing origins both in terms of culture, artistic discipline and sensibility to confront questions of corporeality, physical/visual space and sound-worlds; dancers and a video artist from East Africa, a scenographer, music composer and sculptor from France. The eastern coast of Africa by itself represents centuries of remarkably crossed geo-cultural time-space between African, Asian and Arabic worlds.

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Place of the Spectator

Shift... consists of a structure of 5 scenes or spatial areas. As a starting point the first of these scenes is established before the audience enters the space. The evolution & duration of this and subsequent scenes; the nature of interaction between dancers; the occupation of space; the movement of lights and music are dependent on choices made by the dancers as much as by the public. In this sense the action of the public modifies, therefore determines the resulting overall structure: the audience becomes protagonist in the physical-spatial dramaturgy of the piece in the instant of its presentation. The act of spectating approaches that of presentation.

The audience thus plays dramaturgic function in two ways:-

- making choices that modify the overall structure of the performance
- making choices of individual scenes

Fragmentation / Cummulation / Framming / Defocussing

Specific presentational parameters I'd like to confront.

What if:

- there isn't a central focal point of attention
- space is not oriented in one particular direction that one might think of as the stage
- for both performer and audience there isn't a demarking line distinguishing stage and auditorium
- single or multiple events are alternately located in front, behind, within or out of visual periphery
- both interior and exterior architectural spaces are occupied by performer and audience,
- architectural structures offer visual frames and physical obstacles and are also used to reveal/obstruct sightlines
- the performance is constructed as modules of varying timespan located in different parts of the venue and meant to be experienced as a cummulation of fragmented multi-directional events
- both performer and audience have the possibility for displacement and relocation
- neither the beginning nor end of the performance is signaled the audience is allowed to gradually become aware of the presence/absence of performance
- there is no 'special costume' distinguishing performer and audience
- the performance takes place in a non-conventional theatre space
- the performance consists of a series of overlapping often simultaneous events not constructed to be viewed in entirety over a fixed duration
- the audience is free to choose what event or combination of events to experience, for how long and from which location.

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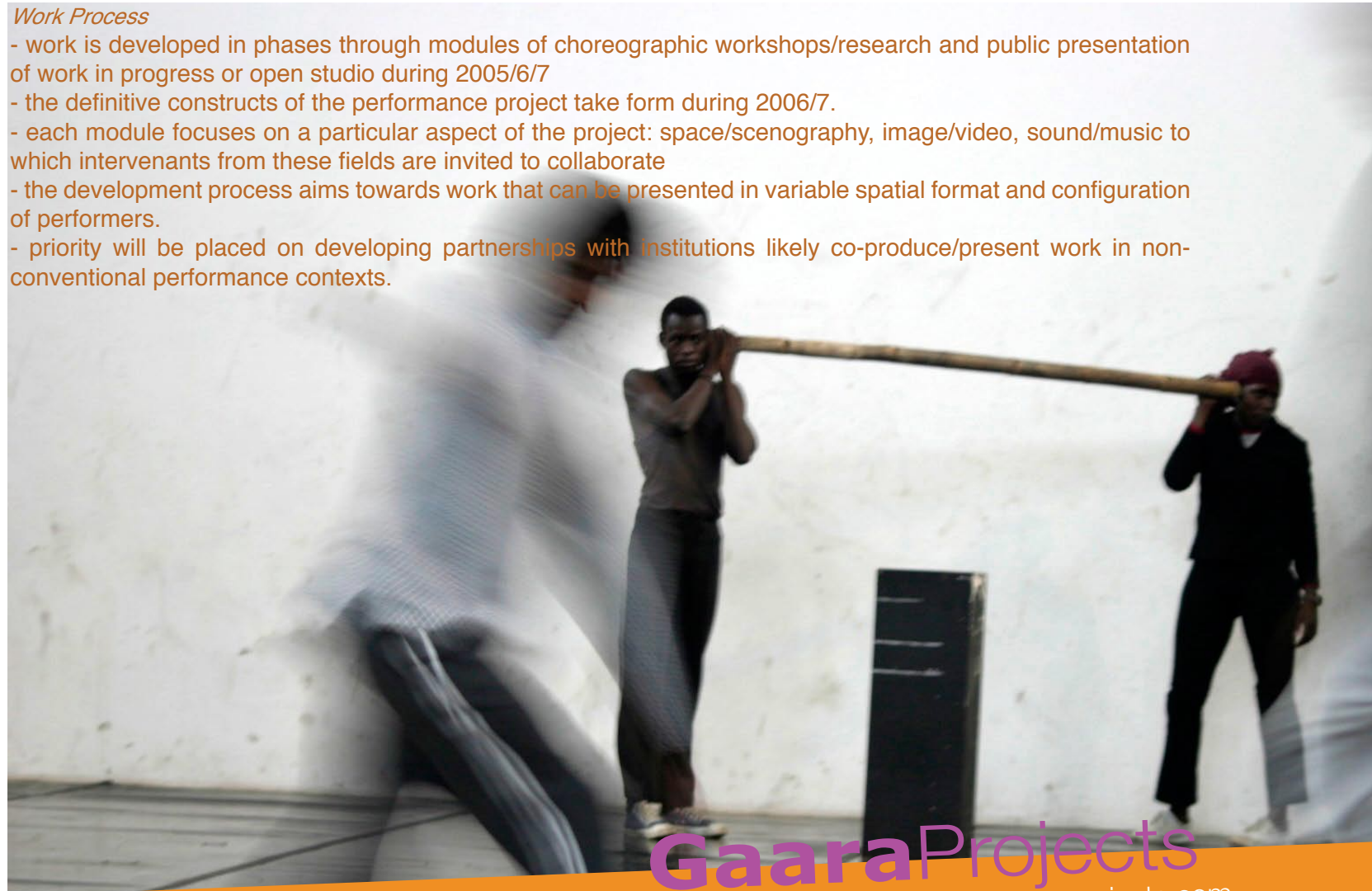
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Work Process

- work is developed in phases through modules of choreographic workshops/research and public presentation of work in progress or open studio during 2005/6/7
- the definitive constructs of the performance project take form during 2006/7.
- each module focuses on a particular aspect of the project: space/scenography, image/video, sound/music to which intervenants from these fields are invited to collaborate
- the development process aims towards work that can be presented in variable spatial format and configuration of performers.
- priority will be placed on developing partnerships with institutions likely co-produce/present work in non-conventional performance contexts.



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Opiyo Okach (1963, Kenya) choreographer, dancer and artistic director of GaaraProjects.

Maintaining his place on the international contemporary dance scene Opiyo Okach divides his time & develops work between France and Kenya. Through a long term choreographic development initiative Okach has acted as a catalyst for a new depth of intellectual reflection and encouraged the development of new perspectives and vocabularies in dance from east africa. Having received the 'prix du Nouveau Talent Chorégraphiques SACD 2003' Okach was recently awarded a 'Prince Claus Award for Culture and Development 2005'.

His solo, Dilo, an improvisation and instant composition work inspired by the mythology of nomadic ethnic groups in eastern Africa, is noticed at Festival Avignon 2002 at the Hivernales following it's beginnings at Parisian alternative scenes. Dilo is then discovery at the Plateaux de Biennale du Val-de-Marne 2001. Since its creation Dilo has toured internationally to over 17 countries (France, Egypt, Italy, Slovenia, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Guyana, Russia, USA, Nigeria, Togo, Kenya, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea...).

In 2003 the society of authors and dramatic composers (SACD) awards him the prix du Nouveau Talent Chorégraphique 2003.

In the framework of Vif du Sujet the SACD commissions him to create a new solo for Festival d'Avignon 2003. His collaboration with Julyen Hamilton, the renown improviser, gives birth to No Man's Gone Now an instant composition work. In spite of the cancellation of Festival Avignon 2003 and Festival Paris Quartier d'Ete where the piece was to premier, No Man... premieres at Centre National de la Danse in January 2004 and has since known international success (Soirées Nomades of Fondation Quartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Plateaux de la Biennale du Val-de-Marne, Aix en Provence, Nouvelles Strasbourg Danse in France, Drei Wochen mit Pina Bausch in Düsseldorf Germany, Fabbrica Europa in Italy, Fitheb in Benin, Festival of Dhow Countries in Zanzibar, Godown Arts Centre Nairobi...)

2004 is rich in new transversal collaboration, notably with choreographer Thierry Niang, hosted in residency in Nairobi. The project results in the duo, Free Figures, presented in France at Festival d'Uzes, 3 Bis Aix and Théâtres en Dracénie. It also marks the beginning of collaboration with choreographer Emmanuel Grivet for the duo, Accords Perdus created at Regards du Cygne in Paris November 2004. Accords Perdus is subsequently presented at Centro Cultura de Matadero (Huesca Spain), Dense Bamako Dance (Mali) and Pôle Sud (Nouvelles Strasbourg Danse)...

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Artistic director of the first contemporary dance company in Kenya Opiyo Okach remains the principle figure of the choreographic landscape of the country. The prize at the second Rencontres Chorégraphiques Africain 1998, for the companies first work - Cleansing, places him amongst the pioneers of a new generation of choreographers from Africa. For the company Cleansing opens the door to the international scene (Montpellier Danse - France, MASA - Cote d'Ivoire, St Leu Danse - Reunion...) It also marks the beginning of support by principle figures of French dance such as Régine Chopinot or Mathilde Monnier.

From 1998 the Ballet Atlantique Régine Chopinot actively supports and partners the group through a series of residencies and choreographic exchange. Having encountered them during an African tour she invites the company for a first residency at Ballet Atlantique. In 1999, she supports, in collaboration with the Centre Chorégraphique de Montpellier, the company's new creation, Rituals of the Rock - inspired by the mythology of nomadic ethnic groups in east africa, composed of the trio Kit Mikaye and, notably, the solo Dilo - for which Opiyo Okach would become known in Europe.

Between 2000 & 2002 Opiyo Okach lays the bases for a long time choreographic development project in Nairobi - Générations 2001, with the support of Ballet Atlantique Régine Chopinot, Association Française d'Action Artistique, Maison Française de Nairobi and later the program Unesco-Aschberg Bursary for Culture. It is also within this context of exchange that they experiment the duo Borderlines with Régine Chopinot in December 2000. In 2002, Abila, a choreographic creation with video and electro-acoustic music emerges from this project, nourished by collaboration between Kenyan artists of different disciplines and exchange with two european composers and a video artist. Premiered in nairobi and at Ballet Atlantique and Centre National de la Danse in France, the creation is presented in 11 countries in Eastern, Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean region (French Cultural Centres, MASA), Iles de Danse in France and several European countries (Germany, Belgium and Italy)

Today Opiyo Okach is artistic director of Gaara Dance Foundation - created in 2002 with the support of Ford Foundation to consolidate the choreographic activity initiated in Kenya. Its activities include choreographic research, artist residency, choreographic exchange, support for creation and diffusion of work. Regional and pan African exchange- such as the Dance Encounters (East African Dance Encounters 2003, Retracing Connections 2004, Encoding Identities 2005) initiated in 2003 are part of its mission. The next international edition of the encounters are in 2007.

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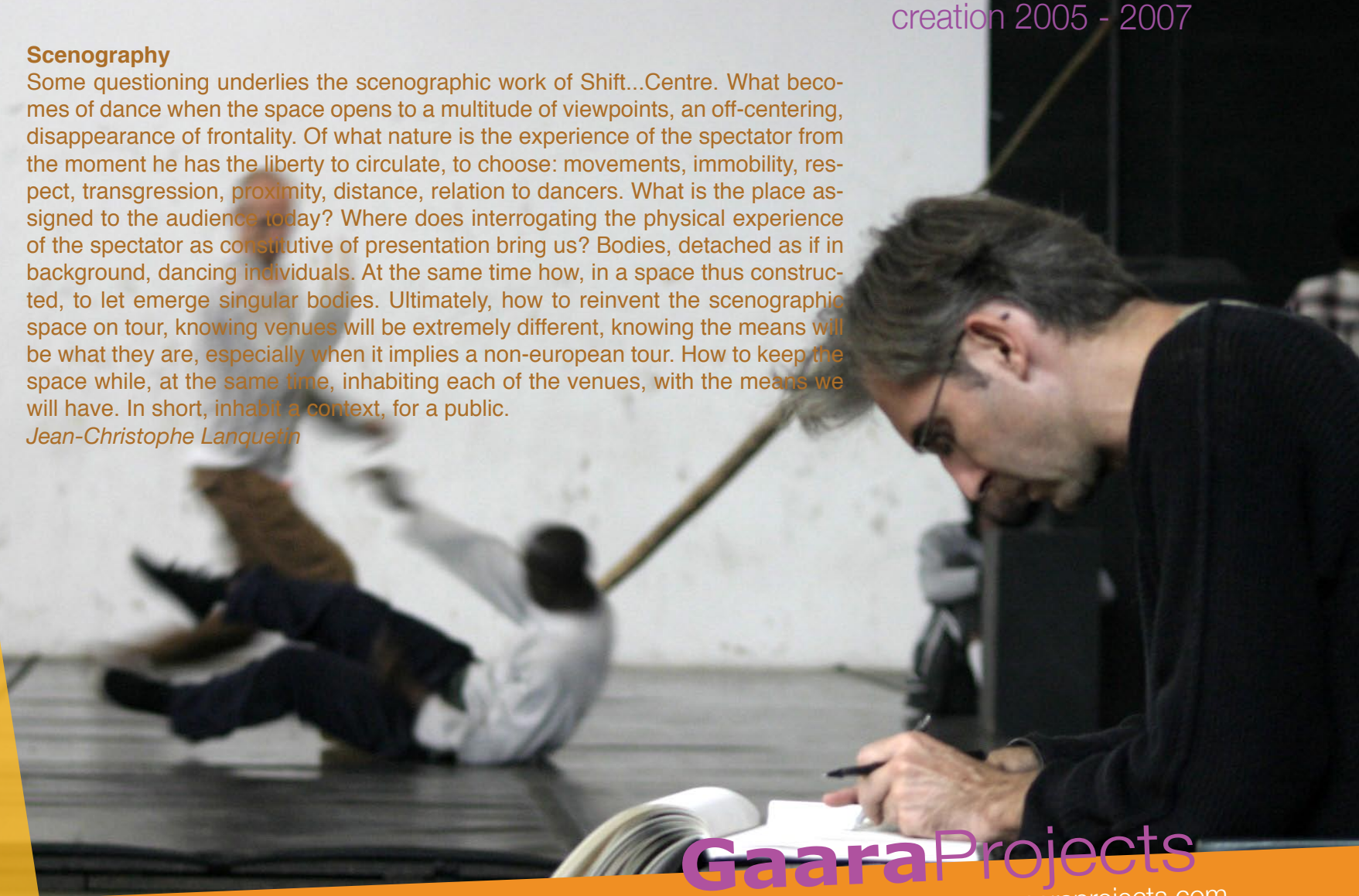
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Scenography

Some questioning underlies the scenographic work of Shift...Centre. What becomes of dance when the space opens to a multitude of viewpoints, an off-centering, disappearance of frontality. Of what nature is the experience of the spectator from the moment he has the liberty to circulate, to choose: movements, immobility, respect, transgression, proximity, distance, relation to dancers. What is the place assigned to the audience today? Where does interrogating the physical experience of the spectator as constitutive of presentation bring us? Bodies, detached as if in background, dancing individuals. At the same time how, in a space thus constructed, to let emerge singular bodies. Ultimately, how to reinvent the scenographic space on tour, knowing venues will be extremely different, knowing the means will be what they are, especially when it implies a non-european tour. How to keep the space while, at the same time, inhabiting each of the venues, with the means we will have. In short, inhabit a context, for a public.

Jean-Christophe Lanquetin



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polska**Video - IngridMwangiRobertHutter**

IngridMwangiRobertHutter has been experimenting with body-memory, translation of emotion to movement (specifically activation/control of emotional expression) and exploring how voice and movement connects. Like Opiyo Okach, Ingrid and Robert are also interested in 'displacement and relocation' but through video technology. Yet in contrast - instead of divergent viewpoints - they are 'focussing on the individual, creating a central focal point which they then shatter into kaleidoscopic facets.'

In recent work they have used live camera. In 'my possession' (2005) they explore the concept of owning and controlling as well as the contradictory sensation of being controlled; possessed by an external power. Combining the qualities of performance - live, immediate, direct - with the qualities of video as a tool of abstraction and extended awareness. Juxtaposing live performance with projected image to allow ideas to unfold in multiplicity.

Media Artist Collective: IngridMwangiRobertHutter

www.mwangi-hutter.de

Soundscore - Thomas Lucas

Thomas Lucas principally uses and subverts new sound technologies on the web and in live installation. Over a number of years his experimentations have progressively lead him to work on throwing into abyss the urban world and contemporary technologies through multiple processes: sometimes by reusing sound sources available in network (global online corporatism: police radios, information networks etc) and also by systematic diversion of our cultural conditioning and dehumanising mass media: video games, security codes, publicity, television, aviation etc.

(...)

(by Joachim Montessuis - Revue Erratum IV 2004)

Sculpture - Polska

Polksa divides her time between her Parisian workshop, her barn in Morvan and her travels. Often invited to Canada, Japan, Gabon, Chile, Estonia, Tcheque Republic, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Portugal and France for symposiums, exhibitions, performances or artist residencies since 1985. She recieved the Prix Bourdelle in 1993 in Paris. Laureat of the competition 'Renouveau du Centre Vile Ronchamp' (Haute Saône), her work is archived in december 2003. After marble and stone, her objects preference are now the tree branch, paper, natural pigment and the patina of time.

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Limoges Honours Dance published 24/11/05

Improvisation

resolutely experimental 'shift...centre' is situated at the crossroads of dance and performance. Based on improvisation and instant composition this piece interrogates double relations: between 'space & perception' & between 'perception & identity'. Two questions that guide the choreographic research of Opiyo Okach for a number of years.

In his previous creation 'Abila' (2002) he investigates through video projection the pluri-dimensionality of space and identity. This time the Choreographer goes further. Through a subtle scenographic device - thanks to the talented Jean-Christophe Lanquetin - who partitions the space through translucent and mobile screens, the approach is more radical.

'Shift Centre' unravels the habitual conventions of representation: no stage-auditorium frontiers, no line of demarcating susceptible to distinguish performers from audience, no notification of beginning or end. Instead the audience is invited to saunter freely within the immense empty hall where the five performers are scattered (four men and a woman)

'Interrogate the idea of space, call into question modes of spatial presentation where there is only one way to see, only one place of truth, is at the heart of the process of Shift, confirms the choreographer. How to allow things to be perceived from different points of view to avoid formatting them? To see only in one way is a tyranny of perception imposed by dominant conventions of presentation. This formats not just the public but the artist as well into a way of creating and perceiving'

Inversely the piece proposes a fragmented and multi-directional approach to space. The dancers improvise in playing not only with proximity of panels and the intriguing sculptures in bamboo - the work of French sculptor Polska - but also with audience displacement. There is no longer a central focal point but an incalculable number of events generated simultaneously: small and big, official and semi-official, each sees what speaks to them: a dancer, the changing reflection of a body on the panel, a strange scene of unison or even the children, who quickly feel at ease in this setting, adventure off public and dance in their turn... the suggested poetry of this liberty, of this multiplication of points of view, restores the magic of the instant, of chance, of present.

Political dimension

'Shift Centre' constitutes thus 'the experience of being on earth in a place here and now and the sharing of this experience' but it's import does not stop here. 'The piece is not a simple esthetic declaration on the subject of space' asserts Opiyo Okach. 'it also evokes the political & social reality.' It is, without doubt, by this dimension that the choreographers work finds its sense.

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For several years, Okach has artistically affirmed a double credo: that of reality and multiple identity and its corollary: a certain cultural relativism called tolerance. In Africa we are in a position of being constantly exposed to a multiplicity of realities and ways of being, he explains. 'We live daily with tradition, Islam, Christianity, MTV... it is normal to speak four languages. (...) When I put on my traditionalist African, I accept reality in a certain way. With my christian hat I see differently. When in Nairobi I function differently from in the village. In Paris it's yet another thing. We accept all these facets as valid ways of being. How is it that in the art of presentation, in our artistic practices we should suddenly abandon this experience of multiple reality?'

The artistic director of Gaaraprojects has always taken care to explore this richness of cultural mix. With successive pieces he unveils different facets of his identity: kenyan, european, urban, connections to people of his origin - the luo, this last piece does not escape the principle. As much by the origins of the artists gathered as by the diversity of artistic field (danse, music, song, video, sculpture). Okach telescopes the borders with pleasure

In Limoges one of the strongest moments is incidentally the presence of an elderly traditional kenyan singer. Ogoya Nengo. Wearing in a long woven dress of unbleached cotton and bearing a broad collar of artisan pearls she brings herself slowly cross the space while singing; arriving within the proximity of a dancer the later modifies their gesture to the point of adopting the sketch of a step into perfect harmony. Fragile encounter, sprout of an identity at sleep.

'Le centre of the world is not just in one place. The centre is not where we are. It is fragmented. It implies to accept reality as multiple phenomenon , always in shift, we can only experience a selection of fragments at a time, recalls the choreographer. Today global trends affirm the dominance of one centre; that there is only one way to see. The danger of a place that that believes to hold the truth, to determine what is right or wrong.'

'why limit ourselves to one when there are 360 degrees possible.' asks Okach citing the architect Zaha Hadid. His dance is the image of this question. It has nothing didactic, demonstrative or spectacular. Guided by instant, fluid and flexible exploration of space, up as down, reflection of breath more than certainty of result.

Ayoko Mensah,
Africultures

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Result of a meeting between the Kenyan Opiyo Okach and the Congolese Faustin Linyekula and the German-Ethiopian Afrah Tenambergen, La Compagnie Gaara founded the bases for a new east African dance as discovered at the African Choreographic Encounters of Luanda in 1998 with Cleansing, a piece in which the mundane gestures of everyday cleaning evoke sometimes violent purification. The prize wins them various invitations to festivals in France, notably Montpellier Danse 1998, as well as on the African continent (Marché des Arts du Spectacle Africain, tour of East Africa). It brought them recognition as one of the pioneering dance companies of Africa.

From 1998 Ballet Atlantique Régine Chopinot actively supports the group through a series of residencies and choreographic exchanges. Having met the company during an African tour she invites them to for a first residency in at Ballet Atlantique. In 1999 she supports, with the collaboration of Centre Chorégraphique de Montpellier, the new creation of the company, Rituals of the Rock, a double creation inspired by the mythology of nomadic ethnic groups in East Africa: Dilo a solo of Opiyo Okach and Kit Mikayi – a trio for female dancers.

From Generations 2001

Project for choreographic development in Kenya...

From 2000 la Compagnie Gaara brings together Ballet Atlantique Régine Chopinot, Association Française d'Action Artistique and La Maison Française de Nairobi around a long term choreographic development project targeting artists from different disciplines in Kenya (traditional dance, theatre, cabaret, fashion, visual arts...)

Between autumn 2000 and January 2002 over twenty artists follow the program titled Générations 2001, made up of workshop modules led by Opiyo Okach and as well as dancers and choreographers invited in residency in Nairobi

The creation of the piece Abila in June 2002 is one of the results of this process

... to Gàara Dance Foundation

Thanks to the support of the Ford Foundation, Gaara Dance Foundation is created in 2002 to consolidate the choreographic work initiated in Kenya. Its activities, choreographic research, artist residency, regional & international choreographic exchange, support for creation and diffusion of work have grown since January 2003 at the Godown Arts Centre – the first renovated warehouse pluridisciplinary artspace in Nairobi. The activities of the foundation have taken regional magnitude with projects such as Danceworks – annual platform for new east African choreography organised in since 2003.

The Dance Encounters of Nairobi (Retracting Connections 2004 & Encoding Identities 2005) opened up to companies from beyond Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Alongside annual regional encounters and development program the wider encounter will continue as a biannual from 2007.

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