

***„Let go of something you want to get a hold on. Trust the moment. Channel the emotions. Don't worry about what comes next, be in the moment, worry only about the now.“***

## **Ira Goldbecher im Gespräch mit Annamari Keskinen und Ryan Mason**

**If dance is movement through space with a certain timing then this description would not apply to your new creation „Blink“. How would you describe the movement that you put on stage? As dance? Or movement research that looks like dance at times but then breaks and doesn't resemble something that we would classify as human because it defies social norm or rule.**

### **Annamari**

Our approach to choreography starts with the dancer in relation to the themes and tasks of the work, through which we explore humanity in relation to the world around us. Sometimes this language of movement may seem distant, or out of the norm, but that is not an end in and of itself. We support research where the inner landscapes of the dancers would manifest into the actual space. In other words, rather than us offering a prescribed form, the dancers provide a space where the material forms itself. The body in this exploration is the toolkit we use to create these often unseen worlds.

### **Ryan**

That is a huge part of what we are asking here. What is human? Is it something you can pars down into a finite explanation or identity? Am I only existing in a singular moment of the present? Am I my past or my future? If we all experience time and space, then is there not a connection between us at some root level? Is there a not me, and if so, what is it? Historically, dance has been a representational form of communication - using the materiality and poetics of dance to point to something else, some kind of ideal or otherness. One concern of this work is to get out of that pattern. So, we try to free ourselves from telling the audience what something is. The audience becomes the composer. They become the space of the dance. The material we are working with is a rhizomatic connection through the dancers. It is a cluster. They are individuals interconnected as a complex web of relationships. We can also look at the audience in relation to the performance as its own complex web.

### **What is rhizomatic?**

### **Ryan**

Organisms that are singular yet connected like the root systems of the trees in the Tiga or mushrooms. And, I think we are trying to find material that can boost that way of perceiving. I can think of myself as being here in the space as an individual, but I can also think of myself as a part of this interview between us, or even as the words in this text.

**Even though everybody brings out movement that is the result of individual research, the movement of each dancer is a bit similar. They look like one body.**

### **Annamari**

Yes, that's good because that's one idea for us. The rhizomatic connection between bodies means that they can also share emotions or feed off the same pool of experiences and feelings. Although different experiences of a situation unfold differently into emotions in each and every person, we

are, after all, human. The idea of the group as one body emphasizes that. However, there is a difference in detail within the repetition and seeming sameness.

**I came to watch different phases or parts of the choreography. I feel like it didn't matter where I came in. I could start in the middle and it would be the same as if I had started from the back. It would be the same.**

**Ryan**

There is no plot. Our work is devised from the process. Like post-dramatic theater, we are not working on linear narratives or traditional dance poetics. We are offering a texture to be experienced - something that allows you to step out of a cause-and-effect way of seeing to a more entangled perception of events and connections. We want to sustain some level of mystery and open up spaces of thought rather than give answers.

**Annamari**

The piece provides an opportunity for momentary feelings and truths. It has its hidden corners that may not be noticed at first or second viewing. Because the piece has a non-linear quality the work appears endless in its way and is like a living painting that can be re-entered from anywhere at any time.

**You worked a lot with improvisation based tasks in order to create material for this piece. In these tasks you took the dancers' minds to imaginary places.**

**Annamari**

In rehearsals, we have been visiting many different places, physically and emotionally. For example, one theme we have been working with is a non-binary perception of pain and pleasure and also all the emotions in between or outside of that. Georges Bataille wrote a book called „The Tears of Eros“ in 1961, in which he inquires into the relationship between violence and the sacred. He also shows photographs of Chinese torture victims of Lingchi, a practice during which the flesh is slowly cut from the body in multiple slices. Bataille suggested another way of looking at lingchi photographs that is not entirely repulsed by the cruelty when looking at them. The victim's faces look upward, eyes rolled back, an expression that might be mistaken for ecstasy. Bataille proposes here an eroticism of pleasure that is achieved at moments when terms such as "divine ecstasy and its opposite, extreme horror" blur together and become interchangeable.

With this idea of blurring and the spectrum range of pain and pleasure in mind, we let the dancers improvise in complete darkness. Often these improvisations were long. 40 minutes or one hour. When we first did it, it was intense and powerful to watch. There was such an energy in the space. After the improvisation, we were revisiting these places again and again with each other in the following days. And every time it was different because the state you are in also influences the way you perceive and experience something which may have been familiar to you the day before. We asked ourselves how can that [perception] be visible? How can you let someone observe you as you are experiencing this?

**But then it is a sequence of emotional states which you put together in a certain order.**

**Ryan**

Assuming we perceive time as a flow from the past, through the present, and toward the future, then yes, there is a temporal order to the piece. One thing happening in the space are virtual ideas

and emotional states, but not only that. That is only one layer. There is also a very present actuality linked to that virtuality. So it's also about what is happening in the room right now. What is happening in my body right now? And, how do I look at that without projecting or defining it before it arrives? How does the work actualize what these things are in the moment? What we are interested in is seeing the group perceive. It is fascinating to watch someone go through this process - a sort of blurring of different realities becomes something palpable.

**So, they would be able to improvise each time?**

**Ryan**

One of the tasks for the dancers is to realize the space they have within a dramaturgical frame. So they have this mise en scene, this arrangement of actions working together, and within that, they approach each performance and each moment within the performance, with an openness for something new to emerge.

**Annamari**

We create a set of tools. We know that the ensemble here is a repertoire company, so they are able to dance in many pieces and have these ready at the top of their heads. So sometimes you get detached from emotional states because you have to reproduce in an instant. With the improvisations and mind spaces, I just wanted them to connect again to themselves. To realize that they already have this massive universe inside of them to work with. The tools we offer are there just to help tap into that universe in the present moment.

**Ryan**

Representations hang on set definitions of things, a set identity of things. We kind of agree that this, for example, is a chair. But you can't say what a chair is in the end. You can describe its features and qualities, but there is no final ultimate description of what a chair is. Drawing from discourses of contemporary philosophy, a thought that has been interesting for us is that there are no actual singular identities to anything, just singularities with sometimes similarities. Everything has its changing difference. It is an extraordinary place to compose from.

**Maybe it is an unsolvable problem that the mind will always look for representations and narratives and it's a task for the viewer to let go of that.**

**Ryan**

That is what we are working on from a dancer's point of view: getting closer to observance and perception rather than representation. The stronger the dancers get at that perceiving, the more unique and approachable it will feel. But that is a complex state to maintain. It is almost like you have to unlearn. When we have something like an improvisational score and the freedom within that, it is still a challenge to perceive the possibilities of each moment, the little emerging moments that you cannot predict. You just sense. Of course, we have to find the dramaturgy within the structure so that these possibilities can happen. A big challenge for us is to find the dramaturgy within this work to make it readable. We do not want to alienate people, but we want to challenge them as we are challenging ourselves.

**You don't use music as such. You use a lot of soundscapes, white noise and textual fragments. The distortion of the words and the lipsyncing make it seem like the body is subordinate to the sounds. The body just simply tries to catch the words ...**

**Annamari**

We are playing with sound and the voice as a material rather than an accompaniment to the dance. There was a work that we performed in Finland in which we created a monologue with Ryan. We started with words and created a little text. Then I felt that it was too clear. These are the words but actually what I mean is more than that. I didn't want to define or put it into a box. So he made his own words. The meaning still remained the same. He put the meaning into words that only he could understand. But somehow it was still too clear, so we played with sounds, did some coding while still keeping the same feeling. And then I was satisfied with the result. Words can focus and categorize our thoughts but they can also sometimes limit us.

## **Ryan**

These dimensions of the work, the dancers, the scenic design, the soundscape, even the audience are engaged in a transference of meaning. With lip-syncing, for example, we have this representation of someone speaking, but at the same time, we are aware this person is not speaking because we hear the words coming from an external source. We can choose how we perceive this. It can be as organic or artificial as we want it to be. The soundscape is a character of the whole work, with the same status as any other material.

**Although you want to shy away from representation, you give several other narrative hints throughout the piece. It is a bit like a manual that will influence all that comes after that and how it is read.**

## **Ryan**

Think of these hints more as symbols that trigger a perception, like the heart that gets shattered. Perhaps they're like symbols of reading the visual rather than a narrative structure. It's a little bit like a proposal on how to look at things or a feeling as a lens to view the work through.

**What atmosphere did you want to create on stage with the set design and how are you achieving that?**

## **Ryan**

Our work is motivated to offer a new way of perceiving. This scenic design functions as a light source, a sculpture, and an expressive entity; it's multidimensional. We believe humanity's more profound reflection and potentiality could rise out of the deconstruction of binaries. When we acknowledge the complexities within and surrounding us, we begin to see the uniqueness of each moment, of each experience. We feel the distance between things and the space filling that distance. And maybe we even find a way to appreciate these distances and differences.