

Möbius

Cie XY and Rachid Ouramdane

Creation September 2019



*« What is within us
If not intensified sky traversed with birds
And deep with winds of homecoming? »*

Rainer Maria Rilke



TOWARDS THE EXTREME UPSTREAM ⁽¹⁾

Imagine a track covered over by the passage of time and rendered invisible. What if we could ultimately revisit the site and trace it back?

In flocks we face headlong into the winds, each gauging the weight of the other, day after day. What comes to light, as we raise each other up with acrobatic lifts, is that we are always anchored in this fertile territory which is acrobatics.

Let us begin to scope out the lie of the land:

A space with natural borders which is naturally porous where we locate our research zone.
A playground laid bare to the four winds.

That which elevates us - by force of acrobatic lifts - is where we have established our test site so let us proceed in empirical fashion to put this into a contemporary context:

With our show *Laissez-Porter* we wanted to reacquaint ourselves with our discipline. It was time to test the solidity of our foundations.

With *Le Grand C* we embarked on a journey, groping our way into the unknown to explore the possibilities of working as a large ensemble. As a result the show was imbued with a degree of solemnity and restraint.

It's Not Yet Midnight... finally enabled us to expand our playing space; a joyful invitation fused with dance, acting and musicality...

Whilst interrogating these principles of collective working - the bedrock of our practice - our new show *Möbius* leads us towards something greater than ourselves.

We are zooming out from ourselves as individuals (how we behave, how we react, how we express ourselves) to consider the bigger picture and ourselves as part of a larger whole.

We are convinced that this holds something invaluable on a universal level.

It seems that all our work has been leading up to this point, charting our course with meticulousness and sensitivity.

MURMURATIONS

Found among shoals of fish, bees, groups of trees and particularly evident in the flocking of starlings; a ballet of hundreds of birds so well regulated and dense that it can eclipse the sun in an instant.

Referred to by the Danish as “black sun”, this is a spectacle only nature can produce.

These murmurations call to us...

There is still so much to learn about this incredible phenomenon of synchronised flight where each member of a group reacts almost simultaneously, as if they were one being.

Here we enter uncharted territory, an ineffable space beyond the ambitions of man.

Here too we find an intriguing similarity with our own aims and artistic practice; the absolute imperative of working as a collective and the transfer of knowledge.

This sharing of wisdom and information, these micro adjustments of the artists’ bodies in relation to each other are the signs of an intuitive corporeal intelligence.

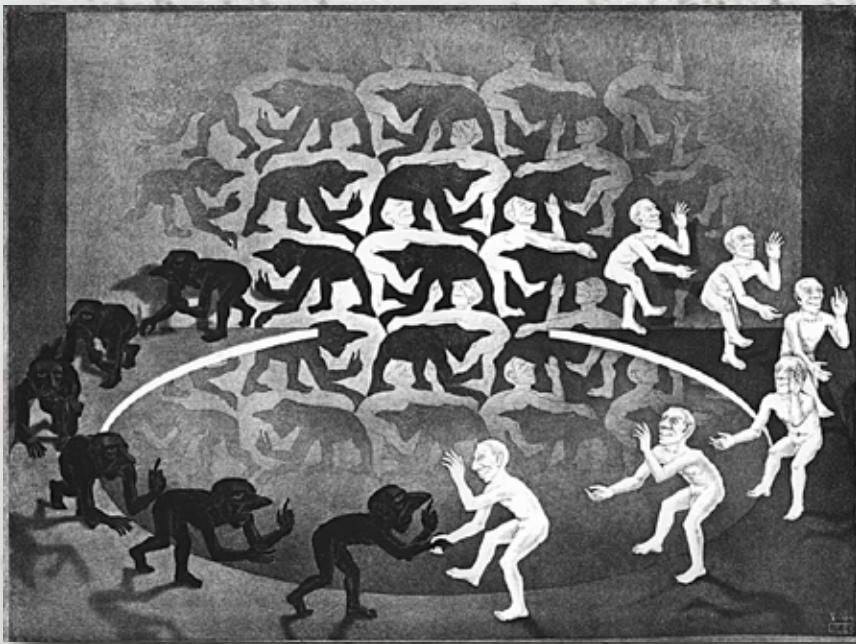
From there one can imagine a scenario where spaces are emptied and filled at lightning speed; zipping from 1 to 19 people on set in a fraction of a second, or even causing a chain reaction, creating a wave effect with our bodies.

This approach reflects our ability to generate speed, regulating it or maintaining it to create magic.

We want to astound the audience with surprise transformations, and play with the effects of levitation or slow motion as observed in these amazing natural phenomena.

Our fascination with these murmurations is shared by Rachid Ouramdane, as described in his statement outlining the nature of our collaboration.





CONTINUUM

The challenge with this piece will be to imagine ourselves in a space time continuum which involves every element of live performance (music, lighting, acrobatics etc.).

The creative process in acrobatics involves working with organic elements which are profoundly unstable and fragile. This 'impermanence' continually brings us back to the fundamental principle of understanding a human being as motion in a state of perpetual evolution.

Taking our inspiration from the imagery in Patrick Tort's book *The Darwin Effect* (2), we use the Möbius band to represent our approach both visually and metaphorically. This band is unique in that it has only one side whilst displaying one or more twists in its surface. It enables us to visualise a continuum which allows for reversals and u-turns in situations without having to bring these into conflict with each other, in the same way that we do not pit nature against culture, or the body against the mind.

In this way we are trying to describe our acrobatics in a state of flux; a space of transformations activated by swells and surges, by conflict, or even temporal loops which might echo each other. We want our characters to be thus absorbed into this flux and ultimately to appear as a suspension in a time continuum rather than culminating in an end point.

We want to create a floating space for the spectator within which time stretches and contracts in tune with the rhythm of the bodies changing shape right before their eyes. In this space we are dicing with magic - bodies being levitated, shapes which split in two, bodies which leave the ground... We are taking the spectator on an inner journey; an emotional landscape as subtle or striking as the changing scenery observed from the window of a train.

INHABITING THE ACROBAT

This reflection has been driving our collective for a long time and is something we want to focus on whilst firstly laying down a challenge for ourselves to question the premise of the acrobatic act. Working on our physical skills and the perceptible things which emerge from this process.

In other words, it is about questioning what it is that leads us to the acrobatic act and asking “what drives us?” in order to envisage a way of extending it towards a longer term view, i.e “where are we headed?”

We try to choose acrobatic material that seems to bring a certain energy and a particular vibration which is then modulated by frequency and rhythm. It is a question of creating a disturbance in the spectator’s perception and triggering quasi reflex mechanisms of excitement, fear or rivalry by engaging directly with their ‘reptilian brain’ (the most primitive part of the brain responsible for our survival).

With this approach we are rerouting the academicism in our practice although we never detach ourselves from it completely. Take a series of three high human towers, for example. Let’s imagine twisting them, softening them, stretching them or clustering them together. Twisting, deflecting, mollifying, stretching, clustering... as many ‘communicable’ actions as chain reactions will emerge in the creation of this piece.

“If the body belongs to the earth, so the soul is bound for the sky” (3)

We never forget that the aim of our practice is to defy gravity. We feel this as innately as a seedling reaching for the sky; this piece is born from a desire to escape gravity, a longing to take flight and soar upwards; to disrupt time, escape the curse of gravitational pull and give free rein to this crazy dream of becoming birds.



SCENERY SCULPTED BY BODY, LIGHT AND SOUND

Just as we will be examining our physical practice in a continuum, so we will also be tackling music, costume and lighting throughout our residencies to enable an ongoing dialogue between all of these aspects of the creative process.

Movement of lighting and movement of sources

The set will not be lit uniformly across its whole surface; certain areas, aisles or pinpoints will be marked out and handled in different ways by playing with different brightness and hues. Adjusting these elements will enable us to highlight the artists' movements and gestures in the space as it transforms.

To highlight these changes we will modulate the lighting transition speed, thereby avoiding any breaks. Moving, balancing or rotating the lighting sources themselves can also reveal movement. We will be working with a very wide spectrum of colours ranging from flat colour to an atmosphere of more natural light.

The necessity of illusion.

Transformation requires illusion and we will be aiming to assimilate the techniques used in stage magic. In this way we will be able to draw the audience's attention to or away from parts of the action onstage – one of our key areas of focus with this piece.

Moving, “living” costumes

In keeping with the idea of the ensemble – the flock – we are thinking about very graphic costumes for the group, and the design will help us achieve the horizontality and verticality we're looking for.

Out of this will come our research into costume design in conjunction with the lighting. We envisage using iridescent fabrics to emphasise the artists' sudden changes in direction which might occur very spontaneously in the show, just like the wind blowing through the trees will create a sudden silvery shimmer under a blazing sun.

To assert our individuality, costumes will be pleated or straight cut and we will play with different fabrics like resistant silk, for example, which will create a real sense of lightness. A black and white palette with touches or spots of colour will emphasise these effects.

We can thus accentuate what we see onstage, reinforcing the illusion of weightlessness, the speed at which the artists move or vanish, whether big or small etc.

Musical Atmosphere

For *Möbius* we have teamed up with two composers, Jonathan Fitoussi and Clemens Hourrière; for several years now they have shared a common passion for electronic lutes with their unique incredible sound.

We soon found there was a lot of common ground between our own acrobatic research and the way they create music: their sounds meeting, colliding or clustering together in a slow and finely nuanced progression, requiring the same continuous adjustment as our own process.

Together we want to devise the music for this show as one continuous soundtrack.

A sound emerges from the depths, like a distant hum: a thread running throughout the piece to be joined by a palette of sounds ranging from the smallest noise all the way up to a melody.

This constantly evolving music with its expansive percussion will leave the door wide open to flights of the imagination, transporting us to strange atmospheres, at times disturbing, at others invigorating.

It will create a raft of sensations - wind, echo, flight etc.

Aren't sound and the murmur of birds both intimately connected to the reverberation of the air, after all?

RACHID OURAMDANE

« The dance pieces I've developed for large ensembles over the past few years have been based on the rapid accumulation of choreographic motifs, creating work where everything escapes your attention and thus presents a metaphor for our own lives. With *Möbius*, the scenario reveals the unique character of each person on stage and implicitly describes the way in which we must all negotiate on a daily basis in order to find our place amongst others. The essence of this dance piece is a highly charged environment where the relationship between the individual and the group is continually being renegotiated. Asserting our own individuality and having the courage to express our differences seems to me particularly relevant at a time when "otherness" evokes fear and stigmatism.

The urgency with which I immerse the artists in the moment reveals their capacity to react in a space where everything is rapidly gathering momentum. You see a collective intelligence beginning to emerge from the protagonists on stage where they must find solutions to "extreme" situations.

The spontaneity of the actors' gestures toward one another creates a microcosm of humanity from which fleeting and unexpected choreographic motifs burst out. It is this material that I'm trying to capture in order to create a scenario where a figure has hardly appeared before it is erased and replaced by another, to the point where you ask yourself if you can actually believe what you've just seen.

Working with the XY collective is proving to be an amazing journey of exploration in terms of the choreography of the group dynamic and their skills which defy gravity. This is a collective who really stretch the possibilities of creating work as an ensemble. The giddy heights they achieve push back the frontiers of choreography to create a piece which is as enigmatic as a flock of starlings in motion; this amazing aerial choreography which seems so harmonious and whose function we have yet to understand. This is where the heart of our collaboration lies, in the mystery of these aerial ballets in perpetual motion, whose movements are never repeated. »

Rachid Ouramdane, October 12th, 2017

Notes & inspiration

- (1) Taken from Alain Damasio's book *La horde du contrevent*. Ed. La Volte, 2004.
- (2) Patrick Tort, *The Darwin Effect: Natural Selection and the Birth of Civilisation*. Ed. Seuil, Collection « Science ouverte », 2008.
- (3) Erik Sablé, *The Wisdom of Birds*. Ed. Zulma, 2002.
 - Plateforme internationale et transdisciplinaire de recherche sur les rythmes dans les sciences, la philosophie et les arts. <http://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article199>
 - CRCA (centre de recherche pour le cognition animale), Université Toulouse 3 - Paul Sabatier. <http://cognition.ups-tlse.fr/>
 - *La fin du courage*, Cynthia Fleury, Ed. Fayard 2010.
 - *L'emploi est mort vive le travail*, Bernard Stiegler, Ed. Mille et une nuit, 2015.

Illustrations

- p.4 *Encounter*, M. C. Escher, 1944.
- p.5 Cie XY, 2017.

MÖBIUS

Acrobats : Abdeliazide Senhadji, Airelle Caen, Alejo Bianchi, Arnau Povedano, Andres Somoza, Antoine Thirion, Belar San Vincente, Florian Sontowski, Gwendal Beylier, Hamza Benlabied, Löríc Fouchereau, Maélie Palomo, Mikis Matsakis, Oded Avinathan, Paula Wittib, Peter Freeman, Seppe Van Looveren, Tuk Frederiksen, Yamil Falvella

Artistic collaboration : Rachid Ouramdane, Jonathan Fitoussi, Clemens Hourrière

Light design : Vincent Millet

Costume design : Nadia Léon

Acrobatic collaboration : Nordine Allal

Production and administration : Peggy Donck and Antoine Billaud

Production : Cie XY

Coproductions : Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie - La Brèche à Cherbourg et le Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf / Le Phénix, Pôle Européen de création, Valenciennes / Maison de la Danse, Lyon / MC2, Grenoble / EPPGHV, Parc de La Villette, Paris / Maison de la Culture de Bourges / TEAT Champ Fleuri, La Réunion / Agora, PNAC Boulazac Aquitaine / Les Gémeaux, Scène nationale de Sceaux / Bonlieu, Scène nationale d'Annecy / Le Carré Magique, PNAC en Bretagne / Espace des arts, Scène nationale de Chalon-sur-Saône / Le Bateau Feu, Scène nationale de Dunkerque / Espace Jean Legendre, théâtre de Compiègne / Festival Perspectives, festival franco-allemand des arts de la scène, Saarbrücken, Allemagne

Residences : Le Sirque, PNAC Nexon Limousin / Furies, PNAC en préfiguration, Châlons-en-Champagne / Cirque Jules Verne, Pôle national cirque et arts de la rue, Amiens / CCN, Grenoble / MC2, Grenoble / Maison de la danse, Lyon / Plateforme 2 Pôles Cirque en Normandie - La Brèche à Cherbourg et le Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf / CIRCa, PNAC Auch / Tandem, Scène nationale, Douai / Le Phénix, Pôle Européen de création, Valenciennes

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The company XY is associated with "le Phénix de Valenciennes" as part of an European Pole of Creation, with "le Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf - Pôle National Cirque de Normandie" and with "le Cirque Jules Verne - Pôle national cirque et arts de la rue (Amiens)".

The company XY is also supported by "la région Grand Est", "le Centre National des Arts du Cirque" and the Bnp-Paribas foundation.

Creation schedule

February 11th to March 3rd, 2019 : MC2, Maison de la culture de Grenoble
April 15th to 28th, 2019 : Maison de la danse, Lyon
May 13th to 26th, 2019 : La Brèche, PNAC Normandie, Cherbourg-en-Cotentin
June 10th to 30th, 2019 : CIRCa, PNAC Auch
July 8th to 20th, 2019 : Tandem, Scène nationale, Douai
September 2nd to 26th, 2019 : Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf, PNAC Normandie
October 14th to 20th, 2019 : Le Phénix, Scène nationale de Valenciennes

September 27th to 29th, 2019 : Premiere in the round at "le Cirque-Théâtre d'Elbeuf"

October - November 2019 : Premiere in frontal stage at the "Festival CIRCa (Auch)" and at "le Phénix de Valenciennes"