

EMBODY, the act of being in which one is no longer representing but simply presenting

EMBODY était à la fois un festival de performance et un laboratoire de deux semaines en janvier 2003 au TanzQuartier à Vienne (A), organisé par Mark Tompkins en collaboration avec Martina Hochmuth, directrice des projets au lieu. Le concept était centré autour de deux thèmes : *Incarner*, en rapport avec l'acte de *performer*, et les questions d'*Identité et de Genre*. Chaque artiste présentait une performance, une conférence ou un film et, en même temps, s'engageait dans un processus collectif qui aboutissait avec une performance public finale. Les 16 participants étaient surtout des performeurs, mais il y avait aussi des plasticiens, des réalisateurs, et des théoriciens :

Daniel Aschwanden A, Milli Bitterli A, Claudia Bosse D, Andrea B. Braidt A, Pavel Braila MD, Isabelle Ginot F, Saskia Hölbling A, Barbara Kraus A, Walter Lauterer A, Vera Mantero P, Mara Mattuschka BG, Mihai Mihalcea R, Miguel Pereira P, Frans Poelstra NL, Robert Trappl A and Mark Tompkins.

2003 : EMBODY at TanzQuartier Wien, Autriche

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These two texts were written a year after EMBODY :

It was important for me that everyone show something from their work - a performance, a conference, a film - and, at the same time, be engaged in a collective process of research which would lead to a final public showing. The carte blanche proposed by TanzQuartier was totally open. It was up to me to define the context, the content and the structure of the manifestation. I developed the concept around two main topics: Embody and Embodiment, in relation to the act of performance, and the questions of Identity, Sex and Gender. These themes would run parallel, become intertwined and on occasion, one would dominate the other. This quite often created a big confusion amongst us, and an interesting and dynamic *bordel* that we called *the club of confusion*. Our only *method*, relied strongly on trial and error, doing something, talking about it, doing something, talking about it, etc. We never attempted to construct scenes or structures for improvisations, but simply experience and witness *potential* and *real* moments of embodiment, especially moments of collective consciousness when the group entered a special state that I called *complex images*.

Martina Hochmuth, who invited me to curate, was my *guardian angel*. Without her advice I might have made many more mistakes than I did. For the selection, the criteria was that the group should include half Viennese and half... not Viennese. Fair enough. It was a question of finding the *right* people whose work I respected and with whom I felt a desire to explore and communicate in a potentially loaded situation of group dynamics. The 16 participants included mostly performers, but also visual artists, filmmakers, and theoreticians. Daniel Aschwanden A, Milli Bitterli A, Claudia Bosse D, Andrea B. Braidt A, Pavel Braila MD, Isabelle Ginot F, Saskia Hölbling A, Barbara Kraus A, Walter Lauterer A, Vera Mantero P, Mara Mattuschka BG, Mihai Mihalcea R, Miguel Pereira P, Frans Poelstra NL, Robert Trappl A and Mark Tompkins.

The project lasted two weeks. Unfortunately, this created a very heavy schedule, with the lab all day and performances almost every night. I realize now that it was much too short to develop and deepen our experience, and expose and share it with an audience. We adapted and survived.

FINAL RETURN 01/01/04

EMBODY - I was so thrilled when the title for the project came, it seemed so right, it created the context and the container for whatever might happen. And finally, so many things did happen, some of which were visible to the public and the participants alike, and many others which were invisible to most if not all, at least in the moment in which they occurred.

I believe in a moment of searching, when you don't really know what you're looking for, after a certain amount of time, the level of confusion leads either to a partial or total shutdown of the systems or to an act of surrender. In any case, these moments are usually followed by an impulse that opens the perceptions and the sensations, the moment of entry into embodiment. This may sound extremely mystical, but it's really very simple and down to earth. It's difficult to explain, but when it happens, everybody agrees about how and when it began, how it fluctuated and how and when it ended. These triggers occur individually and more rarely, collectively. During the time we were together, I witnessed and experienced, on many different occasions and to many different degrees, diverse forms of tension and retreat, and many types of release and surrender, including that some of the participants struggled through various degrees of flu. I find both equally fascinating and valuable.

Having time to experiment and play with such a heterogeneous group of people was great fun. After the first week of usual group dynamics, who am I, what am I doing here, what are we doing here together, feeding our normal desire and curiosity to get to know each other, we shifted into a new operative state the instant we moved into the theatre at the start of week two. Ah, we will perform here, yes, there will be spectators, ok, we are no longer alone together.

This is probably when I made my biggest mistake. I decided to keep the work sessions closed to the public until the final showing. In retrospect I can say that virtually all the major moments of embodiment took place in the work sessions of that week and not in the showing on the final evening. They usually appeared after a long period of individual searching and were sparked by one or two persons to whom the others quickly responded. Like a fire that spreads, something essential was being expressed and you could join in. There was room for everyone and the situations were very complex, contradictory and kept evolving. If we could we do it amongst ourselves, could we do it in public? Unfortunately, I would have to say no. The final showing was basically a deception. We were riding on adrenaline levels we hadn't experienced until then, and the relaxed atmosphere from not-feeling-the-need-to-produce had disappeared, hindering the nurturing and blossoming of those strange and wonderful moments we had experienced in the previous days.

Which is of course somehow in total contradiction with just about everything I've said until now. And which brings me to the following conclusion - if you're working on performance states, the creation of *complex images* and the question of embodiment in performance, you better have a witness as soon as possible because performing amongst yourselves, however stimulating, just doesn't stimulate the systems the same way as with an audience. And for us, the moment of truth came too late, or let's just say that what was the end was simply the beginning.

And the rest we will never know.