

Contre-jour
(2021)

**Alexander /
Vantournhout
/not
standing
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INTRODUCTION

The in-of inscription – a very basic yet complex prefix-is not the “in”-of inside but the “in”- of into. It is a place-seeking, not a place-being, “in”. Inscriptive gestures can be thought of as gestures that write something into a place. They create place or place-ness out of something that is both a no-where and a no-thing – actions of linguistic mark-making themselves. (The Inscription of Gesture: Inward migrations in Dance, Sally Ann Ness)

Live dance is often described as ephemeral because it is considered as happening in the present, in the absolute sense. ‘Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance’, asserts Peggy Phelan in the opening lines of her often quoted essay ‘The Ontology of Performance’.

Movements come and go, they disappear in the very moment they appear, without leaving any material traces: there are only the viewers’ memory traces. *Contre-jour* counters this common idea through the willful production of moment markers, or indexical signs indicating that moments have happened without necessarily mirroring imprints of steps for instance. Yet the inscribed moments are sometimes erased, undone or ‘ex-scribed’.

At stake is not just a dominant idea regarding the antithetical relationship between dance and writing. There is as well a wider (political) context. Thus states per definition control movements, particularly at borders, and therefore try to make them visible, to inscribe them, to register them. This elicits counter-movements or attempts to move invisibly, without leaving traces - as if one wants to dance.



INSPIRATIONS

SWEEPERS

Sweeping the sand serves to keep track of how many people crossed the border from Mexico to the United States. The border patrol sweeps the sand with tires and other DIY-sweepers, in order to clean the surface. As migrants cross mostly at night, the next morning, thanks to the sweeping, the border patrol can see clearer, from footprints, where and how many people crossed that area. The method is meant for statistics. Also cameras, heat and shock sensors are used.



'TRACELESS' SHOES

Countering this tracking method, the Mexicans developed shoes with carpet or burlap sewn into the soles, making it harder to trace the footprints in the desert. These 'traceless shoes' are sold in shops, nearby the border, where also other survival material like camouflage backpacks, clothes, bottles and medicine is being sold.

As the shoes still leave some sort of trace, sometimes migrants use self-made sweepers of cans, bottles, etc. or use a branch to sweep, to overwrite their own footprints.

In the past, soldiers and fugitives on horse have been pulling branches to overwrite their own traces, and thus leave a footprint that is less deep, less obvious.

IN-/EX-SCRIBE

Contre-jour is a choreography that simultaneously re-takes and questions the original meaning of that very notion, i.e. 'writing movements'. The dance will leave its traces and tracks, but as soon as the dancers have moved on a couple of meters, a 'sweeper' has already overwritten their traces. Through this paradoxical moment of in- and ex-scription, *Contre-jour* tries to make the audience aware of the trajectory of the dancer. This way the performance will work on the utopian idea that one can directly visualize or correctly remember the dancers' choreography while seeing the traces in the sand.

DIRECT REGISTERING

In/ex-scribing movements is not only a state-affair, one that is related to the importance of movement traces for border surveillance and in war-like situations. Making one's movements invisible or producing misleading inscriptions may also be a matter of life or death in the animal world. It is therefore also interesting to look at how animals minimize or change their direct traces.

Direct registering is an ipsi- or homolateral gait of four legged animals (left-left paw followed by right-right paw), where the animal places each hind paw (almost) directly in the print of the corresponding fore paw. This is also called 'perfect walking'. Cats can thus minimize their own tracks as, while they walk, they leave what may look like single file prints (instead of double), one right in line with the other.

Direct registering provides sure footing for their hind paws when they navigate rough terrain. Animals that stalk their prey carefully choose where they place their front feet, so they do not break twigs or make other noises. Then the quadrupeds place their hind feet in the exact spot, so they can locomote silently from place to place. Cats, felines and ringtails, ... will show perfect registering; dogs however, have lost their ability to register. Just as horses lost their ability to run ipsilaterally, with the exception of the Icelandic horse, thanks to the volcanic landscape in the island. For *Contre-jour*, we will also study the locomotions of animals like snakes, reptiles or water striders to nourish our movement research.





CHOREOGRAPHICAL IDEAS

We start by focusing on precision of the inscription (slow and precarious movement). The stage is fully covered in sand, a female dancer enters and precariously executes a choreography. At one point, she doubles her traces/footsteps as you might see in following video, which is an invite for 1 or 2 other performers to follow the tracks.

Another idea would research the concept of erasure. Dancers will use erasing strategies like pulling a branch along (tied around the waste). The trace is 'swept away', as soon as the dancers keep on moving forward, in a delay of 2-3 seconds about 150cm (branch)?

Another dancer pulls a giant sweeper along (made out of truck-tires), representing the 'border control'. The movement can be precarious, precise, well calculated, although it is just like in the myth of Sisyphus, the dancer sweeping the stage, but at the same time other dancers, scripting the surface...

After mainly focusing on the idea an creation of traces, we would reverse the research by using traceless shoes. What impact does consciously erasing traces have on the movement?

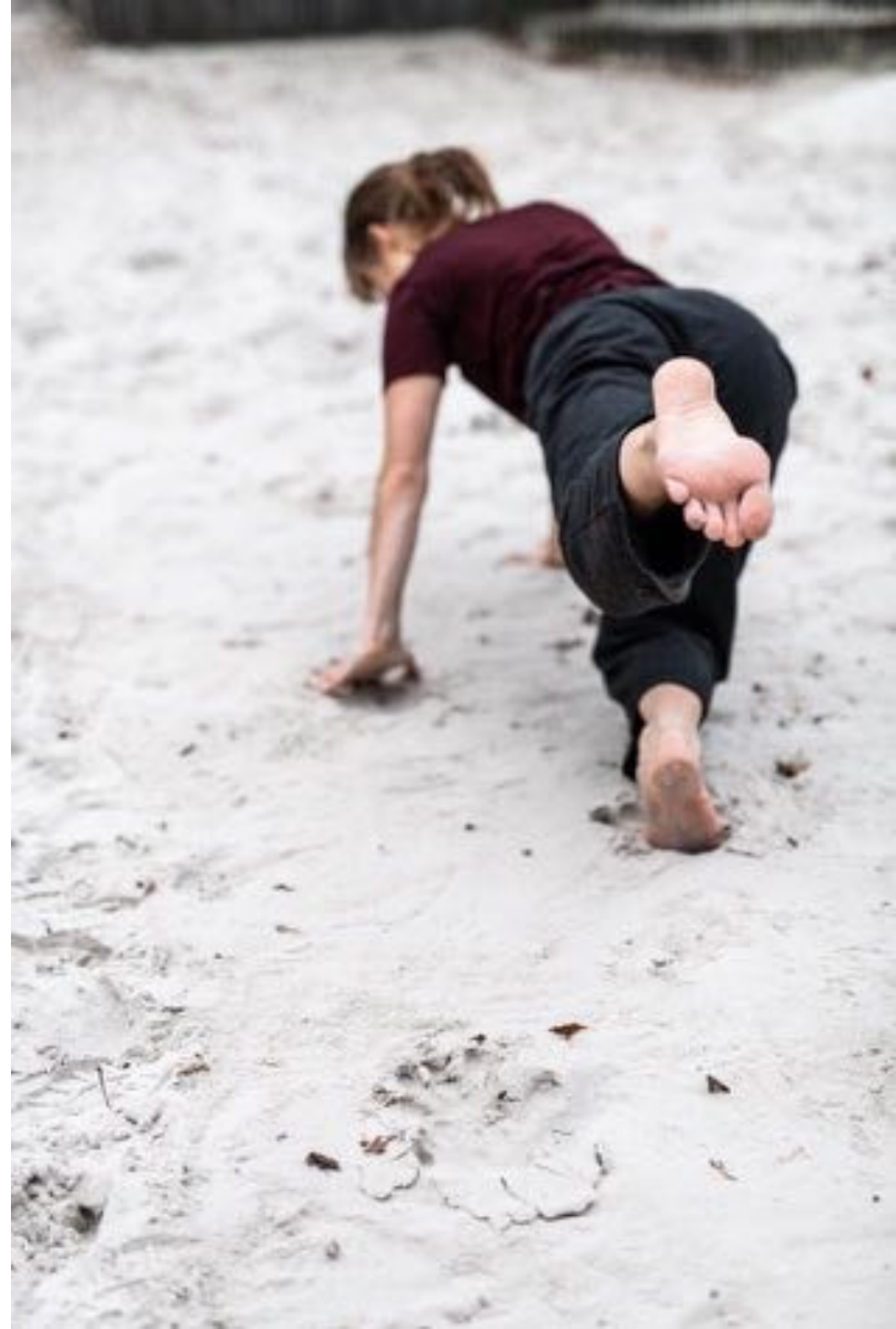
RELATION TO FORMER PROJECTS

There is an inherent link with how the movement material was generated in previous creations: the inspiration from contexts that are not directly connected to contemporary dance or theatre. Martial arts, circus, sports and also animal physiognomy and locomotion are reoccurring sources of inspiration. Nevertheless, an association to a concrete political situation will be highlighted for the first time. Even though the latter choice is well-considered, the effect of the "relocation" of the material borrowed or appropriated from a different context is always given priority.

'Found footage' is treated as a movement material - choreographically. It is a form of recontextualisation - the work does not deal with pure or formal movement-character of the material, but it focuses on the residue of recontextualisation, that still sticks to remaining dance-, choreographic-, or movement-material in its original signification.

To put it in another way, recontextualising stays, as the verbs already suggest, the initial context continues to resonate (just like the sports or circus in *Screws* (2019)). This is the core of the research Alexander Vantournhout conducts over and over again.

With *Contre-jour* a dimension might be added, namely the problem of in/exscription that evokes the notion of choreography as such. As in previous performances, choreographies will be made in *Contre-jour* too. Although more reflexively: the choreography is at the same time a meta-choreography (a commentary on the notion of choreography), but without becoming conceptual - the emphasis on physical actions remains far too important, even primordial.



CREDITS

Concept and choreography: Alexander Vantournhout
Choreographical assistant: Emmi Väisänen
Performers: Kim Amankwaa, Philomene Authelet, Tina Breiova,
Noémi Devaux & Aymara Parola

Rehearsal directors: Anneleen Keppens, Esse Vanderbruggen, & Maria Madeira
Dramaturgy: Rudi Laermans & Sébastien Hendrickx
Light creation: Harry Cole
Vocal coach: Fabienne Seveillac
Costume design: Sofie Durnez
Technical directors: Rinus Samyn & Bram Vandeghinste
Videography: Stanislav Dobak
Photography: Bart Grietens
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Production & tour manager: Aïda Gabriëls

Production: Alexander Vantournhout / not standing
Co-production: Kunstencentrum Vooruit Gent (BE), Theater op de Markt Neerpelt (BE),
CENTQUATRE-Paris (FR), Cirque-Théâtre Elbeuf (FR), Charleroi danse centre
chorégraphique de Wallonie-Bruxelles (FR), Lithuanian Dance Information Center (LT),
Theater Freiburg (DE), Peeping Tom (BE) and others

With the support of the Flemish Authorities.

Alexander Vantournhout is artist-in-residence in arts center Vooruit in Ghent
and associated artist of le CENTQUATRE Paris and Cirque-théâtre Elbeuf.

He is cultural ambassador of the city of Roeselare and is also supported by
Fondation BNP Paribas for the development of his projects.

INFO

Team on tour: 10 (5 performers, 1 tour manager, 2 technicians, 1
choreographer/rehearsal director (depending on the tour))
Duration of performance: 60-90 min
Set-up: one day before performance
Stage: surface 10x10 m, preferably flat floor theatre



BIOGRAPHY

Alexander Vantournhout (Brussels-based, 1989) studied contemporary dance at P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts and Research Training Studios), the school founded by Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker, and single wheel, juggling and dance acrobatics at ESAC (Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque).

Alexander's movement language is influenced by different pedagogical processes and by working across several fields within the arts. Two constants within his artist pursuits are a search for creative and kinetic potential in physicality and an investigation into many aspects of the relationship between performer and object

2014 marks the premiere of his first piece, *Caprices*, a choreographic solo to the music of Sciarrino. *Aneckxander* (2015), a second solo, co-created with Bauke Lievens, won the Circus Next award in 2014, the Public and Young Theatre Prize at Theater Aan Zee (Ostend, 2015), was selected for the Aerowaves Network, and was selected for Het Theaterfestival 2016, the prize for the most remarkable Belgian performances. His first duet *Raphaël* (2017) was co-created with Bauke Lievens in the framework of the research project *Between being and imagining: towards a methodology for artistic research in contemporary circus*, supported by the research fund of HoGent/KASK School of Arts, Ghent (BE). In 2018 Alexander premieres with *La Rose en Céramique*, a movement solo accompanying the theatrical solo of Scali Delpeyrat at Festival d'Avignon. Soon after follows his first ensemble piece for 4 men, *Red Haired Men*, which has been touring around Europe for more than 2 years now.

In *Screws*, created in 2019, Vantournhout guides the audience, together with 5 dancer-acrobats, along a route of reverberating micro performances, from short solos and duets to pointed group choreographies. With *Through the Grapevine* (2020), Alexander returns to the format of a duet. It's his first true duet and builds upon the concept of *Aneckxander* (2015) to a certain extent. The body is reintroduced in a highly pure form and the performance delves into the creative, kinetic potential of physical limitations, a theme that is reflected throughout Vantournhout's complete oeuvre.

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"Vantournhout's work is so ingenious that it is impossible to describe. You can only look with admiration and concentration at the phenomenal physical intelligence on display. In just a few years, Vantournhout has developed a unique choreographic language that draws on dance techniques, martial arts, circus, yoga, anatomy and the animal world."

— De Standaard



DRAMATURGY / **Sébastien Hendrickx** works as a dramaturge, art critic, performing artist and teacher. Previously he was artistic director of Bâtard Festival and house dramaturge at KVS Brussels. As a production dramaturge he has been working for Benjamin Verdonck, Thomas Bellinck, Jozef Wouters, Simon Allemeersch, Heike Langsdorf, Ula Sickle, Piet Arfeuille, David Weber-Krebs, Alexander Vantournhout, Luanda Casella, Mette Edvardsen and Bosse Provoost. In 2014 he won the Marie-Kleine Gartman prize for his essay *Art pretending to be something other than art* and in 2016 the prize for young art criticism for a review on Jan Fabre's *Mount Olympus*. Since June 2014 he has been part of the core editorial staff of the performing arts magazine Etcetera. In addition, he regularly publishes on visual art in De Witte Raaf. He teaches Drama at the KASK/School of Arts in Ghent. He recently finished his first performance *The Good Life*, which will be shown in, among others, NTGent and KANAL Brussel in 2021.

DRAMATURGY / **Rudi Laermans** is professor of social theory at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the KULeuven. Laermans is also involved in the theoretical programme of P.A.R.T.S.. As a guest professor, Laermans has collaborated with various art academies such as the Design Academy in Eindhoven and the Willem De Kooning Academy in Rotterdam, the Royal Danish Art Academy in Copenhagen, the Malmö Art Academy and DOCH School of Dance and Circus in Stockholm. Laermans has published numerous essays and books on social and cultural theory, cultural politics and participation, contemporary dance and visual arts. Laermans fulfilled the role of dramaturge for many contemporary choreographers such as Ula Sickle, Eleanor Bauer and Alexander Vantournhout.

LIGHT / **Harry Cole** studied the art of light as an assistant in light design at HetPaleis. In 1997 he started as a freelance lighting designer for various directors and houses such as Jan Fabre, Alain Platel, Arne Sierens, Voetvolk/Lisbeth Gruwez, Het Gevolg, hetPaleis, KVS, Dito Dito, Young@Heart Chorus Northampton USA, RuhrTriennale. Cole also shares his knowledge as a professor at RITCS in Brussels (where he is also Head of Stage Techniques), STEPP, Sabbattini etc.



VIDEO / The Slovak **Stanislav Dobák** graduated from the Bratislava National Dance Conservatory and continued his studies at P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels. During this training his artistic focus was triggered to go beyond the boundaries of dance as a discipline and Stanislav explored the possibilities of contemporary art, video and photography. In addition to his dance career, Stanislav obtained his Bachelor in Photography from the University of Hertfordshire, UK, in 2016. He works as a freelance choreographer, dancer, photographer and videographer.