

**pzazz**

PERFORMANCE

## Playground Festival 2024

DD DORVILLIER / VIOLAINE LOCHU / EZRA VELDHUIS EN BOSSE  
PROVOOST / GOUVERNEMENT

### **To be or not to be...normal**

**To be or not to be...normal** by Pieter T'Jonck

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The Playground festival in Leuven, the 17th already, explores every year the border between what we call 'visual art' and 'live art' or thus theatre, dance or music. With this edition, a specific theme - intended or not - emerged: with what perspective do we look at the world and what (judgmental) divisions are at play. Questions such as: what is normal and what is not, what is successful and what is not, what is meaningful and what is not, or even: what is consciousness and who 'owns' it? It produced intriguing propositions.

(...)

#### **DD Dorvillier: questions as signifiers**

While Violaine Lochu made the move from visual art to outright performance, DD Dorvillier did the opposite in 'COS it's in the cards'. As an installation, it consists of eight short fragments from performances made between 1990 and 2002 - the longest lasts no more than 90 seconds - a text, a double set of cards and a series of flags with remarkable motifs. Most have something of an imaginary heraldry, but one consists of a white cloth on which three small patches of the same white fabric are almost imperceptibly stitched.

You can't do much with that unless you read the text. She discusses at length how you could create a taxonomy of movements based on various characteristics. Movement source (origin of movements), for example, is about the imagery on which a movement is based. This includes items like 'As if' (pretending to be a ballerina, for example) or also 'Inevitable' (a movement that cannot be reversed once turned on: falling is a typical example). 'Spatial strategy' in turn looks at the spatial distribution or organisation of a movement, ranging from 'Déplacement' to 'Kaleidoscopic'. 'Zone of presence', in turn, is a characteristic with only two facets: you are either 'eloquent', in which case it seems as if you want to say something, or 'kinesthetic', the moment when the dancer completely coincides with his movement. Dorvillier also mentions 'Fragment type', 'Reference' and 'Tool'. The latter refers to the objects that co-determine the movement.

If you start looking at the film fragments with this knowledge, a light does shine on why exactly those fragments were chosen: they are clear illustrations of a specific combination of characteristics. In 'Falling Trio', for example, two dancers hold a third by the arms while he falls backwards, after which they swiftly switch positions and another one falls backwards. This gives the combination: Kinesthetic/drawing-interlocking/inevitable/contact improvisation/touch, others, floor.

Not that such a taxonomy would be as tight as Linneaus' plant taxonomy. It would suffice to mention other basic parameters to get a very different mix, but as with almost any form of dance notation, Dorvillier's does prove quite suitable for analysing her own work. That's where the cards and flags come in: they are part of the performance Dorvillier held several times with Céline Larrère and Damien Briançon, regular collaborators since she swapped New York for Burgundy.

She opens the performance with the somewhat gloomy observation that with every performance she made, she thought afterwards that it wasn't quite that after all. Whereupon she swore expensive oaths that the next one would be better. And so on. That cycle of disappointments was brought to a halt by dancer and choreographer Jennifer Lacey's suggestion to look at the works as a tarot game. In tarot, you ask yourself a question and then draw one or more cards. You then think about the answer that card might offer to your question.

Translated to this performance: the tarot deck are a set of cards that, like the flags, symbolise one of the choreographic fragments. The questions belong to a second set of cards. During the performance, visitors are asked to choose one question and one image fragment each time, whereupon the three dancers take turns trying to formulate an answer to the question based on the fragment, which they then perform live a few times, but without the accompanying music, costumes, lighting, etc. The 'naked' material as it were.

That game may seem a bit childish, but it is anything but. It shows how you can read and reread dance, and how you can constantly assign new meaning to it by first deleting all context and then looking back from a specific interest or question. During the performance I saw, from the performers' side, this provided sometimes witty, sometimes profound insights, but it also made my brain work overtime as I tried to link the question and the dance and then compare that back to what I first saw in it. This play shows that you can never see dance - and by extension just about any art form - 'objectively', but only from a question that arises, whether it comes from yourself - which is always the case to a greater or smaller extent - or is already suggested in the performance itself. Heartwarming here, moreover, was how generously the performers interacted with their audience. They really wanted to share something.

In a way, this performance was the best run-up one could wish for before going to see 'Boroboroton' by Diederik Peeters at the same festival. That work shows that, in the end, a performance always takes shape only in the mind of the viewer. That implies that there are thousands, even millions of readings. Or - and this is the consolation Dorvillier takes from this performance - that no work is ever 'lost', however disappointed the creator may sometimes be about it.

Source: <https://www.pzazz.theater/nl/recensies/performance/to-be-or-not-to-be-normal>