

critical correspondence

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Moving Dialogue: A Critical Report on Made in NY/28th October Moving Dialog



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(NOTE: I participated as one of the performers in Vava Stefanescu's work. For this reason, I nominated the following text as a *critical report* instead of an article or review, as my perspective of her work encompasses my experience as a performer.)

During her residency showing at Dance Theater Workshop for the Movement Research's *Moving Dialogue: A Bucharest/New York Dance Exchange*, the Romanian choreographer Vava Stefanescu decided to share not a work-in-progress but her process of making a work, which she titled *Made in NY/28th of October Moving Dialog*. All the choreographers and writers involved in Moving Dialogue were invited to participate in her show, improvising a movement score or an action about what each one had learned about Stefanescu during the exchange.

Even though the proposal may sound pretentious, Stefanescu's idea was, as she defined in her program notes, "to make a self-presentation out of memory" with the people she was in contact with for the ten days prior to her showing. Living in a moment she does not feel incited to dance, the choreographer stated this showing was also a response to all the new input and inspiration received from the participants of Moving Dialogue and from the city. She used her presentation to expose her process and to bring the dialogue to the stage. Mihaela Dancs, MĂfđĂflina Dan, HeJin Jang, Levi Gonzalez, Paul Dunca, Gina Serbanescu, Cosmin Manolescu, Maggie Bennett, Anna Drozdowski and I all accepted to work in collaboration with her idea.

Stefanescu avoided explanations about how we should proceed. She just let us know we would seat on chairs while she would have a monologue in the beginning of the work. No other directives were given.

As her work started, some chairs were placed in a semi-circle on the stage, facing the audience. Another chair was placed with its back to the public. The performers sat on the chairs, while Mihaela Dancs sat facing us with her back to the spectators. She read wish and wish not lists from Vava Stefanescu's notebook. After reading them, she placed the notebook on the center of the stage and the confusion among us was established. Nobody was certain of what to do. From that point on, each participant started improvising.

Instead of starting the action I had prepared with what I learned about Stefanescu, I understood I could not hold on to my script anymore. I had prepared an individual and immersive action that consisted of sewing pieces of cloth with words about and by Stefanescu on the inside of a coat of mine. I would later wear this coat that brought Vava inside, both to refer to the impressions I had about her and to the memory of her presence. However, the dynamics of the work at that point seemed to belong to a group decision, even if the actions were individually developed. My script seemed too structured and safe to flow in the uncertainty that was established among us. I allowed myself to be guided by the flux, trying to make a decision about how to restart.



Made in NY/ 28th October Moving Dialog © by Vava ĂztefĂfnescu and collaborators at Dance Theater Workshop, 2010. Photo: Cosmin Manolescu, Thumbnail photo: Cosmin Manolescu

Cosmin Manolescu started jogging in place in front of his chair. After a while, I started to run upstairs and downstairs in the audience to refer to the choreographer's stated wish to be able to climb the stairs speedily. Someone started to place the chairs leaning on the back wall of the theater. I sat down with my back to the wall looking at the audience. I crossed the stage looking at HeJin Jang, Maggie Bennett and Cosmin Manolescu who were improvising movements. I looked at the folded metal chairs leaning at the wall and my gaze was attracted by the contrast of the beige color against the black wall and the symmetry of their arrangement. I walked to the chairs and started to rearrange them on the floor. I tried to create a kind of installation, giving the chairs more volume and spatial consistence through their

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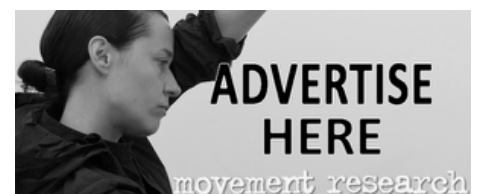
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material accumulation. I thought about the changing visibility of those chairs initially arranged in a semi-circle and then lined up leaned on the wall. I wanted to offer them a different, more consistent body, and by extent, a new visibility (and only now, while I am writing this report, I realize that Stefanescu mentioned in our first Moving Dialogue day in the studio, that she lived through many “different bodies”).

When the lined up chairs were all relocated, I decided to use the chairs as the ground for working with my weight and balance. Levi Gonzalez also walked over the folded chairs. Suddenly everybody was working on clapping slowly until a crescendo and back to the slow pace, simulating the sound of rain when it reaches the point of a storm and then disappears. Gonzalez and I joined the clapping chorus without moving from where we were. The clapping chorus was an exercise used by Stefanescu to refer to the listening to each other in an improvisation. The work was finished.

It is possible to identify a complex intersection of interests in the proposal made by Stefanescu. *Made in NY* consisted of a work on perception and how the performers on the stage created and represented the identity of the choreographer through their own. Simultaneously, her option led the choreographer to deal with the absence of control of her investigation. Through asking the performers to perform her, Ștefănescu shared the authorship of the work, in which her creation consisted of simply “being” herself.

These perspectives can be expanded: the perception of the other and the embodiment of one’s attributes or memory – especially considering the context of a cultural exchange – implies a complex process of reception and learning concerning the other. Attentioniveness, judgment, decoding and association are aspects inherent to this process of translating the other into an action or movement.

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