

Le Monde

Vincent Dupont, choreographer of the strange

(Vincent Dupont, chorégraphe de l'étrange)

There are shocks that are soft but leave a lasting trace. *Jachères improvisations*, presented in 2002 by Vincent Dupont at the Ménagerie de verre, Paris, was one such shock: shrouded in darkness, against a hazy backdrop, a couple vibrates at a distance, slowly, infinitely. Are they living beings or optical illusions? This surreal story, stunning like long, slow flash of light, paved the way for choreographer Vincent Dupont's career. His work since might be stuck in the same strange bubble, but it gives unlimited access to a universe haunted by phantoms lost in the cloudy forms of a skilfully lit mirage.

Fifty-four year old Vincent Dupont has added two new chapters to his saga of the bizarre. *Refuge*, for two dancers and around fifty cardboard boxes, will run from January 8th to 11th at the Théâtre des Abbesses, Paris. It follows on the heels of *Cinq apparitions successives*, performed in December 2018 at the Ménagerie de verre, where irradiated creatures emerged from the folds of a white curtain. These back-to-back events highlight the discrete but unique presence of Vincent Dupont in the world of contemporary dance. Dupont has forged a lasting career with his unique ability to create entirely new universes with magical intensity. "The apparitions come from a distance," he explains. "I did photography when I was 12 and printed my own pictures in black and white. The image doesn't appear straight away, it moves. Multiple metamorphoses take place in the meantime."

Vincent Dupont has created around a dozen works since 2001. They were all initially inspired by "dreams, nightmares or haunting visions that I want to share so as to better understand them." His association is called *J'y pense souvent...* A phrase from a text by Franz Kafka, one of his favourite authors, which he quotes from memory. The text evokes the recurring theme of education and includes the expression "nervous fright", which Dupont says is "an exciting sensation to feel and find on stage". "I particularly love the concentric nature of his writing," he adds, "It circles relentlessly around the topic, getting closer and closer, never reaching it, but all the while pointing precisely to it." Perhaps this is another kind of apparition. As for "nervous fright", mission accomplished for Vincent Dupont, who cleverly installs a sometimes hair-raising atmosphere of anxiety between moments of grace and awe.

Take a tour inside his head: the padded cocoon in *Stéréoscopia* (2014) sends a pair of twins in to the interplanetary sphere of cloning. Another dance duet, *Air* (2013), orchestrates a flow of enigmatic presences buoyed along by songs and gasps, referencing Jean Rouch's film, *Les Tambours d'avant*, on a possession ceremony in Niger. The three-hand performance *Souffles* (2010) tries to pierce the living mystery of a levitating body. "There's a threat hanging in the air, but even I don't know where it will come from." Dupont says. "What are we really seeing? There is often a distortion, a gap between appearances and something deeper, more archaic perhaps, something not necessarily pretty or clean, that I'm trying to bring to the stage to produce a kind of catharsis."

A fascination for sound

There is ritual in this choreographer's work, trance too, hidden in the ectoplasms of his performances. Its impact is augmented by a soundtrack, distorted with sounds from wireless and throat mics. This savage rift between image and voice reaches a strident peak in *Hauts cris (miniature)* (2005), Vincent Dupont's only solo work (inspired by a text by Agrippa d'Aubigné), which sees him trapped screaming in a dining room too small for his size. Dupont traces his fascination for sounds back to a significant experience around 15 years ago, when he was able to enter an anechoic chamber, or "deaf room", at the Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music (Icram). "It's a cube filled with foam that absorbs sound", he explains. "In the middle there's a platform. You can only hear your own breath amplified with incredible clarity. It's a destabilising experience, and can make people fall."

Express the unsayable, say what cannot be expressed. While they may be pulled to shreds, words are also very important in the work of Vincent Dupont. His connection to literature and poetry comes from his early career on the stage. In the early 1990s he worked with theatre directors Antoine Caubet and Hubert Colas and with film director Claire Denis. He was 27 when he first worked with a choreographer, Thierry Niang. "I realised how enriching it is to get out of our physical habits" Dupont says. "So much goes on before a performer speaks on stage..." Dupont then followed up with pieces in collaboration with Georges Appaix and Boris Charmatz.

While his work is not what we would traditionally call dance, he identifies first and foremost as a choreographer. "My main focus is the body, and how can one movement in the body can be different from others," he adds. "For me that is the basis of contemporary dance, a force in the present that expresses itself through singular beings, taking the risk to exist. We're all looking for that undiscovered path of movement that you can sometimes find. It can be the quest of a lifetime."

With Vincent Dupont, the experience of the first night (or almost) is renewed with each performance. Each night, his team operates live. On lights, Yves Godin touches the edges of haziness. On sound, Maxime Fabre, distends the smallest breath. "Body, set, text... no element dominates the others." Vincent Dupont explains. "I have a greater and greater appreciation for powerful fragility of the moment of performance when we move forward together." With faith in the here and now of the theatre to suddenly shift time and space elsewhere.

by ROSITA BOISSEAU - published on January 5, 2019

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