

Techn/iques/ologies of transformation Everything is possible, but not in any order.

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We humans have the power to imagine and reflect on what can be.

And yet, while the field of possibilities may appear unlimited to us, it inevitably comes up against a more limited scope of such possibilities, in part defined according to parameters of scientific value, but also, undeniably, related to the brevity of our lives.

This applies to our perceptions and what "contains" them, that is, what, ultimately reveals itself as a source of creative activity, and therefore, technical invention.

When considering technique as a derivative of a type of manipulation, inseparable from knowhow, in order to produce a specific outcome, and technology as deriving from a more systematic and global approach to this technical capacity, we also enter the field of transformation (i.e. "what can be") and what the latter involves on the highest level.

This is the aspect of things that I have chosen to study in terms of dance, starting with considerations which I have often taken time to think about, striving to understand this art in a universal framework, while examining one of its most fascinating socio-cultural and aesthetic forms, namely the circle of African dance.

We can easily visualize the idea of a circle, in particular with regard to traditional dances of subSaharan Africa; this circle seems to correspond to the form and arrangement of many manifestations of dance and music occurring there.

However, the term refers to a reality beyond the spatial representation we are accustomed to imagining. Indeed, it refers to the dynamic relations dance and music carry on with each other and the entire universe, in other words a continuous, progressing regenerative process.

On the subject of African music, here is what Mr. Alta Annaus Mensah say : "Frequently in African music, two or more time sequences are juxtaposed while admitting an additional sequence between the first ones, or four sequences starting from three, and so forth. (...) Part of the task of ethnomusicology consists of recognizing this phenomenon, revealing what seems obscure to a casual listener. It must be able to recognize these dynamics unique to African music, consisting of a multiplication of times."*

For my part, it is no different when, answering journalists' questions about the "motif" of my choreographic creations, I say; "I make time".

Another researcher, in the literary field, Mr Titinga Frederic Pacere, regarding the drum, makes an interesting point in his book "Le langage des tam-tams et masques d'Afrique". From his standpoint, we should speak of a "drummed literature" (falsely associated with oral literature) because such literature refers to the profound and complex text of the drum, a sort of metalanguage. He has studied the example of the Bendre, (drum of the Mosi people of Burkina Faso.)**

From this point we can glimpse how it is possible to understand the role of the drum (a central instrument among the many other musical instruments in Africa); its technology, and how it is associated with the circle of dance in sub-Saharan Africa. The drum makes sound and time work together (this is the code) so it "calls", while taking many directions (challenging the code) and demanding a response (participatory mode).

Here, it is impossible to rely on exotic viewpoints (even when they claim to be scholarly) about African dances, where it is often a question of surrendering to uncontrolled and uncontrollable rhythms of the drum. The circle of dance described here, where musicians and dancers challenge one another, embodies and fulfils human intelligence.

Organizing the whole while making time sequences - which define rhythm – constantly evolving (this is the mode of progression), means on the part of all, musicians and dancers, full participation in an ongoing process which is both rigorously established and open: this is what defines the circle of dance. This is how M. Chernoff describes it in this book that explores what he calls "African rhythm and sensibility" ***

"The aesthetic decision which constitutes excellence will be the timing of the change and the choice of a new pattern. [...] With the dynamic potential of the beat as a foundation, the changes put pressure on the existing rhythms, and those rhythms become transformed in the sense that the musician, as we might say, 'renders his interpretation' of the beat; the new style will cut the music differently and maintain the tension from a different rhythmic perspective, often intruding new tensions to support or go against the perspective which a spectator, or a dancer, had been trying to maintain".

At the heart of this highly dynamic, committed and intelligent process is the dancer, whose entire presence is fundamentally transformative. By his breath, step and gesture, the dancer initiates a conversation between the intimate and the universal, which the drum enters with him. Like the drummer, the dancer can reconfigure time sequences and thereby contract or dilate space inside and outside of his body.

In my opinion, the idea of progression is far more important than that of improvisation in this circle of dance and it refers to a far more comprehensive understanding of all the elements involved in the dynamics of transformation. In fact, here it involves identifying a means of taking charge of living relational forces. These cannot be simply stated or affirmed without being challenged in order to negotiate them, implying, on an aesthetic level inseparable from

the level of transformation required, a change in the level of complexity which both integrates and retains (retention and inclusion aspect) and opens up (space and possibility).

Thus, the circle of dance offers us the model of what can be defined aesthetically as deriving from a very high level of participation, itself very reliant on these techniques/ologies we have discussed above.

“While we count our actions, time dismisses them” Zab Maboungou, Décompte 2007

* Music and Dance in Africa, Alta Annans Mensah. The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre/Africa. Editions Dan Robin, Ousmane Diakhate and Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh, London & New York, 2001, 31-32

**Le langage des Tam-Tams en Afrique, Titinga Frédéric Pacere, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2001. p. 84.

***African Rhythm and African Sensibilities, John Miller Chernoff, University of Chicago Press, p.100-101.