



# Portrættet

## The Striking Presence of Absence

50/50 | Mette Ingvarsen 2004

Foto: Peter Lanaerts

# The Striking Presence of Absence

## A Portrait of Mette Ingvarsten

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### A Relational Portrait

When does something stop being dance? How far can you take choreography before it becomes an installation or a performance piece? What is choreography in the expanded field – between the arts and between (bodily) movement and discourse? How can one shift the agency of movement? Mette Ingvarsten explores the ontological status of dance and the political implications this entails.

Mette Ingvarsten burst onto the dance scene as a young woman a little more than a decade ago. She is now one of the most influential artists working in choreography.<sup>1</sup> Along with Xavier LeRoy, Jérôme Bel, Boris Charmatz, Eszter Salamon and others, Ingvarsten shares an interest in questioning what dance is. Her staging of an interplay between physical presence and absence is an important part of what makes Ingvarsten's work dense.<sup>2</sup> Her works are highly conceptual, yet sensuous choreographic pieces. Writing her portrait, however, is a challenging task because even when Ingvarsten is blatantly on show, she escapes us – in her performances as well as in her writings.<sup>3</sup> From time to time she is visible as a (non-)directing director of materials (in *The Artificial Nature Project*, 2012). Her 'presence' is sometimes overwhelming; sometimes silent (as in *50/50*, 2004), sometimes naked (*50/50*, *69 Positions*, 2014, *Manual Focus*, 2003), sometimes eloquently speaking (*69 Positions*) or sounding and singing (*All the way out there*, 2011). As a solo-performer, Ingvarsten is remarkable; she has an ability for constant transformation and a subtle wit. In what follows we have set ourselves the task of focusing on both the choreographer and performer Mette Ingvarsten. We examine the aesthetics and compositional strategies with which she composes her oeuvre, and its relation to a dance-historical and -theoretical context.

Ingvarsten studied in Amsterdam and Brussels where she graduated from the performing arts school P.A.R.T.S. in 2004. Already before her graduation she presented a piece with three masked

- 1) Her work has been institutionalized and supported well; she was artist-in-residence at the Kaaitheater from 2013–16, artist in the APAP network and will be part of the artistic team at Volksbühne, Berlin under the direction of Chris Dercon. And yet, Mette Ingvarsten remains in-between the institutions and economic structures. In 2008 she participated in a project called *6M1L (Six Months, 1 Location)* that had been initiated by Xavier LeRoy and Bojana Cvejic in collaboration with colleagues. They created a funded and temporary working group (in cooperation with the Centre Choreographique, Montpellier) to investigate how certain working conditions would produce new methods, formats, discourses and procedures – reflecting the neoliberal project-structures and product-aimed creative work. The project emphasized 'responsiveness' and integrated the accidental into practice by using forms of de- and reskilling. Many iconic pieces resulted from this collaborative project, like *Low Piece* by Xavier LeRoy, *It's in the air* and *Where is my privacy* by Mette Ingvarsten, and Frédéric Gies' *Danse (practicable)*. See Chauchat and Ingvarsten (eds.).
- 2) "Absence" is also the central concept in Gerald Siegmund's psychoanalytically-based study on contemporary choreographers like William Forsythe (and also Mette Ingvarsten). See Siegmund.
- 3) Ingvarsten is also a researcher and teacher in an academic and artistic context. In 2016 she finished her dissertation at Lund University (in collaboration with Stockholm University of the Arts), Ingvarsten, *Expanded Choreography*.

female dancers who presented twisting figures reminiscent of Hans Bellmer's disproportionally and falsely assembled dolls: *Manual Focus* (Maar). This piece marks an early stage of the use of everyday movements in Ingvartsen's work,<sup>4</sup> of "stretching simple ideas to the outermost" (Ångström) and of presenting bodies in affective statuses, applying performance art elements without any kind or narrative framing.<sup>5</sup> She questions bodies in movement in relation to the theatrical apparatus of representation.

In *Manual Focus* as well as in *50/50* Ingvartsen undermined body-image regimes of beauty and coherent subjectivity by subverting them into grotesque and monstrous figurations (Maar). Since then she has initiated a multitude of performances and research projects which cannot be fully represented here. Recurrent motifs, questions and ideas in her work are kinaesthesia, affect, perception and sensation which she explores in experimental settings and by basic operations, de- and reconstructing the (un-)familiar.

Ingvartsen is one of the prime European representatives of conceptual dance. Her pieces seem to appear in cycles, which could be named: the early works (on the relation between body, movement and representation with a focus on affect and perception), a series of non-anthropocentric choreography (*The Artificial Nature Project*, *Evaporated Landscapes* and two installations). And, most recently, the *The Red Pieces* which deal with the relation between the private and the public (e.g. concerning sexuality and emotionality in *69 Positions* and *7 Pleasures*, 2015).

### **Ingvartsen as Performer: *Exhausting the body***

Ingvartsen frequently performs in her own pieces many of which are solo works. Her stage presence is striking, at the same time as she can keep a sense of distance or even seem absent from situations in which she is so clearly the stripped centre of attention. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has pondered the naked body as a social impossibility: nudity is, according to Agamben, an event – a "denudation or a baring" – much rather than a state (p. 65). He refers to Erik Peterson who claims that without clothing, we are entirely uninterpretable.<sup>6</sup> So what happens, when Ingvartsen takes her clothes off (and often remains naked for the entirety of her pieces)? She uses nudity as one way of bringing the material body to the fore. Another, sometimes complementary, strategy with which she achieves such focus on the material body is by exploring techniques of 'exhausting' it. This often physically affects the spectator.

In *50/50* Ingvartsen stands on the black stage alone and naked with her back to the audience. Mirroring the music's drum roll with her movement in a first 'circus sequence', she isolates her bottom from the rest of her body in a virtuous 'twerking' act. This is followed by Ingvartsen, naked still, stepping into a tableau of bright frontal lighting accompanied by the sound of ecstatic outcries, which evokes a rock concert. Her 'full-body playback' of the soundtrack's exclamations draws on familiar poses of spontaneous passion in a typical rock concert lighting, while the audience cheers.<sup>7</sup>

What is remarkable, both compositionally and in her performance is the stringing together of climax after climax, especially in the first moments of *50/50*. Every bit of what she does is intense;

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- 4) The use of simple movements like standing, falling, jumping, lying, sitting and walking (or shaking isolated body parts) references the movement material by the Judson choreographers, but also compositional structures by Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker.
  - 5) Ingvartsen's admiration for Jérôme Bel seems evident (Strecker).
  - 6) Fashion scholar Joanne Entwistle agrees (p. 6).
  - 7) Brandstetter, Brandl-Risi and Diekmann describe posing as necessarily a citational act; a form of control that demands iconographic awareness and discipline (p. 19).

after the apotheotic sequence of the concert 'playback' follows a singing episode which culminates in Ingvarsten striking a tone as high as she can – testing the borders of various physical intensities. She then goes through a register of different gestures taken from opera. These are explicitly theatrical, sometimes melodramatic in their suggested emotional intensity and performed in a tableau-vivant-like fashion. Ingvarsten covers a substantial repertoire of expressed emotions and stretches time when transitioning from one to the next, which turns several of the operatic gestures into clownesque grimaces. While one gesture can be full of heroic pathos, Ingvarsten's use of slow-motion might turn the next one into a grotesque defiguration.

This 'going through the motions' of tableau-vivant-like poses reappears in the following year's group work *to come* (2005). The piece begins as an exercise in 'exhausting' possibilities of bodily arrangements in the sense of showing 'pose after pose after pose'; all seemingly taken from a visually conscious sexual orgy whose participants are anonymised by full-body costumes in bright blue. Besides these living 'tableaus', *to come* includes half an hour of intense swing dancing by the five performers, exhausting their bodies in the literal, physical sense of the word.

In the context of Ingvarsten's more recent work, *to come* can be seen as a first reflection on sexual desires and their ceaseless exposure in the media. The introductory text on *to come* states: "Flesh, fluids, skin, tits and muscles no longer belong to the late hours in a dark joint somewhere around the corner but to our daily life input. We can't just click the 'deselect' that controls the stimulation of desires and how it effects our view upon bodies in general. Pleasure is a must." ("to come")<sup>8</sup>

After having watched Ingvarsten and the Swedish dancer/choreographer Jefta van Dinther jump on large trampolines for an hour in their *It's in the Air* (2008), one feels as if kinaesthetically continuing the up and down movement. The piece evokes an embodied response, and makes its audience aware of themselves physically perceiving the movement.<sup>9</sup> Ingvarsten's and van Dinther's performance moves from subtle bouncing to fervent leaping, from moments of jumping to instances of apparently 'being jumped'. In this performance, like in *50/50* and *to come*, the 'exhaustion' of the movements is twofold: it concerns both the using up of a vast amount of movement possibilities in the given context and the obvious physical exhaustion that results from jumping for an hour.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze alludes to combinatorial exercises in the former sense in his short work "The Exhausted". He writes that in exhausting (the point of which is that it exhausts "all the possible") "you combine the set of variables of a situation, provided you renounce all order of preference and all organization of goal, all signification" (Deleuze 1995, p. 3-4).<sup>10</sup> This, according to Deleuze, is altogether different from tiredness. In creating an intensity that undermines the notion of bodies as representative tools, Ingvarsten significantly draws on 'exhausting' movement possibilities in the Deleuzian sense, as a disinterested category that has renounced all need for signification (p. 5). This, however, often also entails physical tiredness of the performing bodies, whose materiality is brought to the fore.

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8) That Ingvarsten in *to come* chose to link this overexposed sexuality to black music and dance is a fact that some have found problematic.

9) "Just as affect is a relational process" writes Dee Reynolds, "dance is a movement through and across bodies rather than being an attribute of the dancers' bodies." (p. 129)

10) Deleuze explores the notion of 'exhaustion' in the work of Samuel Beckett, and pays particular attention to Beckett's *Quad* (1982), a piece for television in which four protagonists perform a sort of quadrille.



Mette Ingvartsen: *Manual Focus*, 2003.  
Foto: Peter Lenaerts

### Physical quotations

Ingvartsen's focus on material bodies is powerful. But it is worth noting and discussing her parallel ability – and proneness – to seemingly absent personal, individual aspects of her physicality when on stage. Being able to subtly distance herself is particularly remarkable in the instances where she performs naked. In her early works *Manual Focus* (2003), *50/50* and to come, face masks, a wig and full body suits were worn by Ingvartsen and her co-performers – all of which made for obvious distancing tools. But she has also used the 'physical quote' to deny the audience direct 'access' to her private naked body. Ingvartsen has explored this compositional strategy comprehensively in *69 Positions* (2014), the first work in her "Red Pieces" cycle.

Ingvartsen had already begun to investigate ways of evading the audience's unrestricted gaze in *Manual Focus*.<sup>11</sup> The piece features herself and two other women performers, stripped of their clothes and performing with their bare 'rear side' towards the audience. On the backs of their heads, however, is a mask that shows the baldhead of an old man – who is, logically, facing the audience. The three women's naked bodies transform into something entirely different – the nudity becomes part of that different sign system and seems to disappear as the nudity of the three performers.

In *50/50* there are instances in the beginning of the piece that undeniably conjure up images of female nudity being spectacularly put on show. The drum roll and the audience's whooping and 'whoo-hoo'-ing may well add to the impression of a naked female body performing a (sexualised) trick. But as the performance continues, the synchronicity with the sound quickly

11) The dissolve of what was formerly known as the 'private sphere' was an explicit interest in *Where Is My Privacy* (2008), a collaborative project of Ingvartsen's with Sirah Foighel Brutmann and Manon Santkin. Over a period of seven months, the trio experimented with making a choreography together, communicating only via videos they uploaded on Youtube.

makes the movement seem less 'about' her body or about revealing anything personal. German theatre researcher André Eiermann has argued that in accompanying the recorded music with her movement, Ingvartsen's naked body is 'dressed' in the exterior sound (p. 160). At the same time, her face appears disassociated from the performer's 'self'. According to Eiermann, Ingvartsen appears particularly 'faceless' in the beginning of the piece, her head floating above the bodily actions like an uninvolved red cloud (p. 158-59). And taking off her mask/wig later on does not evoke any 'personality display', either (p. 149). Disfiguring grimaces and contortions deny us, as spectators, an entry to any notion of an 'authentic Mette Ingvartsen'.

In 69 Positions, a "guided tour through an archive of sexual performances" ("69 Positions"), Ingvartsen oscillates between the role of narrator, re-enacting performer, commenting researcher and ghostly medium from the past. She functions, for the audience, as an eloquent guide through the evening - presenting documents and anecdotal material from performance history.<sup>12</sup> She then shifts into the role of dancing illustrator, and recreates experimental performance art of the 1960s. Ingvartsen re-enacts a scene from Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes* (1965) in which the performers strip out of their clothes while keeping eye contact with individual spectators. But again, the way the scene plays out, it does not make for a situation of unfiltered bodily 'closeness'. Rather, Ingvartsen performs it very clearly in the mode of 'physical quotation', explaining and illustrating Halprin's artistic practice. Ingvartsen's gestures and poses quote someone else's work; and through the act of quotation Ingvartsen disguises and protects her own body which is physically exposed to the audience's gaze. A gaze that, as a consequence, seems to meander between voyeurism and shameful attempts to block out the blatant physicality in order to perceive Ingvartsen as distanced art "object" within the institutional frame. 69 Positions is characterised by Ingvartsen's constant movement in and out of different roles: sometimes her own voice and body takes centre stage, sometimes she lends them to the documents of the 1960s. Seen in this light, Ingvartsen's use of physical quotes functions as a disguise.<sup>13</sup> In dealing with the naked female body and sexuality in public space, Ingvartsen's use of distancing techniques that refuse unambiguous objectification must be seen as a considered aesthetic and political choice.

### A Choreography more than Human<sup>14</sup>

Ingvartsen's works unravel complex relations between body and movement, and disturb the seemingly natural synthesis of the two. Recently there has been a shift in Ingvartsen's work on and with the body: The body has vanished... almost.<sup>15</sup>

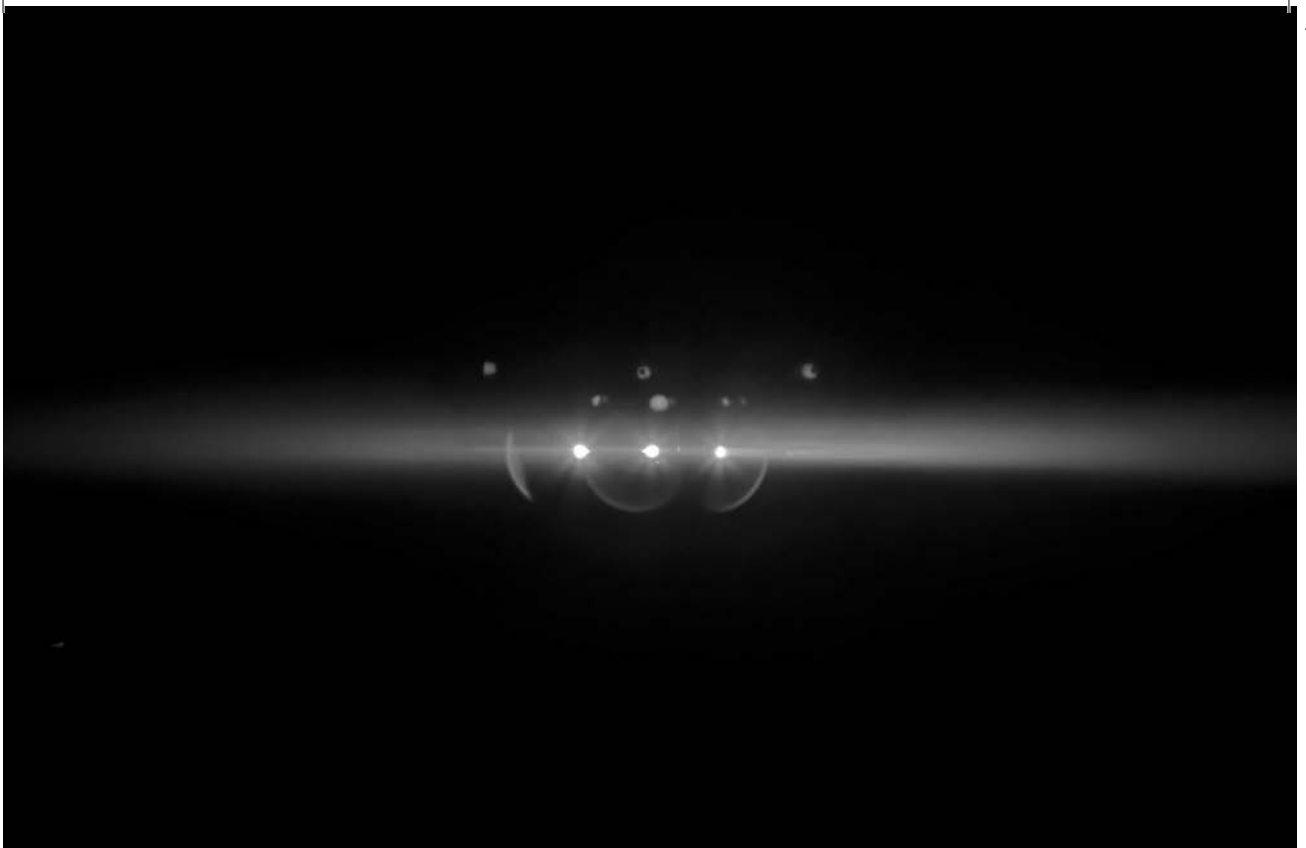
In 2012 *The Artificial Nature Project* premiered at PACT Zollverein Essen. The piece presents a dark and deserted stage where silver confetti 'rains' to the floor, shimmering in sparse light like fireflies or little flashes. The confetti accumulates in small mounds on stage, transforming it into

12) The selection has a focus on group activities that feature nakedness and sexuality. It refers to the sex position 69, to the 1960s as times of social and political shifts and conflicts and also to specific pieces such as Richard Schechner's *Dionysos 69* (1968) or Carolee Schneeman's *Meat Joy* (1964).

13) Similarly, the poses and movement vocabulary in *to come* and *50/50* were often familiar from more or less specific cultural performances, and Ingvartsen (and her co-performers in *to come*) deliver them as recognizable. As quotes, they reveal less about the dancers' own, personal bodies.

14) We borrow this phrase from Manning (p. 81).

15) For further examples of absent bodies being staged, see Eszter Salamon's *Tales of the Bodiless* (2011), Boris Charmatz' *héâtre élévision* (2003) and pieces by Hiroaki Umeda or Manuel Pelmus. For a description of the dance-historical context, see Ploebst.



Mette Ingvarsten: *Evaporated Landscapes*

Foto: Wolfgang Silveri

a setting of “indeterminacy” and non-representation (Ingvarsten, “Running Commentary”); an unfamiliar lunar landscape, or a post-apocalyptic scenario. Performers in overalls and protective masks enter the stage and reinforce the evocation of a poisoned world: as if we are witnessing the devastating effects of climate change. The performers carry with them air-blowing machines and start, with the power of their machines, to disperse, direct and re-form the confetti - changing its positions. The confetti becomes “drifting sand, sparking fire, bubbling water, or a whirling storm” (Egert 2016, p. 70), ‘queering’ the relation between culture and nature, animate and inanimate objects. We perceive a constant transformation, what German dance and theatre studies scholar Gerko Egert refers to as a “weather-world” (ibid., p. 71) and, based on British social-anthropologist Tim Ingold, calls a “complex interplay of forces, where one cannot differentiate between a given setting (landscape), a number of active players (wind, sun, seagulls, humans), and a set of actions (blowing, shining, flying, watching, moving)” (ibid.). This non-human interplay of forces offers a re-thinking of the human body and choreography: What happens when human actions are de-centered? Dance is usually associated with the human body, and choreography understood in terms of active sequencing and composing of bodily movement. But *The Artificial Nature Project* is composed in real-time, without dancing bodies and with seemingly unpredictable results, bringing awareness to the relationality of things: Every little change alters the “ecology” or “milieu” of the movement (Manning quoted in Egert 2016, p. 72). And this virtual thought becomes palpable; we feel how the movement of the de-essentialized things affects us. Not in the manner in which the sublime of a distant, romantic landscape would move us, but in an affective and kinaesthetic way.

Already in 2009, Ingvarsten presented a project called *Evaporated Landscapes*, where four

foam cones resembling snow-capped peaks with vexing colours form a miniature landscape. It resembles a view from a plane. In the piece the foam landscape constantly transforms, morphed by the use of dry-ice-fog. Ingvartsen uses traditional theatrical light and technical effects; “optical seductions (that) arise from nothing more than light, foam, fog and bubbles” (Nehring 2009). This early artificial landscape seems to introduce Ingvartsen’s idea of “getting rid of the human” (Ingvartsen, forthcoming).<sup>16</sup> And yet, a striking and provoking presence of absence is at play: one human is very present in the performance without being explicitly on show. The choreographer and performer Ingvartsen herself stands like a ‘priestess’ or marionette-player at the periphery of the set, manipulating, playing, re-arranging the constellation, remaining author of this ‘dancing landscape’.

By de-centering the human and emphasizing the position of non-human and even non-living materials, Ingvartsen’s two pieces suggest a de-hierarchization of world ‘materials’, pointing out our co-dependency as humans.<sup>17</sup> In her commentary on *The Artificial Nature Project* Ingvartsen borrows a thinking model from French sociologist Bruno Latour. He introduced the actor-network-theory in the 1990s where actants (neither objects nor subjects) as interveners and operators made a difference in an auto-poietic eco-system (Ingvartsen, forthcoming; Latour 1996). This relational actant structure seems to be illustrated and played out here. Ingvartsen’s reference to Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* conjures up the question of ‘material agency’ which is of primary relevance regarding a dancer’s movement in a milieu of things, where he or she is being constantly touched, choreographed, rearranged by the force of other beings / materials (Ingvartsen, forthcoming).

By highlighting relationality, *The Artificial Nature Project* suggests that nothing is a given but can be changed at any time (Ingvartsen 2005, p. 75).<sup>18</sup> This might be an underlying political and utopian potential in this piece: a diagrammatic dimension where ethical and responsible behaviour (towards all materials and beings on Earth) can perform another, maybe better future. And yet again, there is an irony or ambivalence in Ingvartsen’s thinking and choreographing the Anthropocene: The scene is all but without human. She is the author and in control of this piece which she presents in a theatrical apparatus with a subjectified perspective. Performers are in control and manipulate the material actively. This inherently questions the Anthropocene by touching and unveiling its paradoxical borders.<sup>19</sup>

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16) Compare also the installation works: *The Extrasensorial Garden* (Copenhagen, 2010), *The Light Forest* (Szene, Salzburg, 2011).

17) *The Artificial Nature Project* as well as *Evaporated Landscapes* relate to the Anthropocene, the not yet recognized subdivision of geological time. It figures in recent philosophical and interdisciplinary discourse as well as in artistic pieces; often as a critique of the fact that we live in the first epoch where humans have left a traceable and irrevocable impact on the Earth’s geology and ecosystems, due to complex processes of industrial, economic-technological globalization with its radical exploitation of raw materials, and excess of population. See e.g. the catalogue for the exhibition *The Anthropocene* at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin (Renn and Scherer 2015).

18) Ångström observes that Ingvartsen’s pieces never become theoretically dry but that they work on a physical level.

19) In recent years the Anthropocene, its concept of (post-)humanity and its ethical imperative, has been reread critically in the humanities, for instance by Manemann. Manemann critiques that the Anthropocene to some degree serves as neoliberal justification to again gain absolute control over the Earth and unveils terms like “ecoengineering” to be even more hierarchical. He proposes a new “human-ecology” instead.



## Theory and Practice and Practice and Theory

Discourse and theoretical approaches which in Ingvartsen's pieces often manifest themselves in conceptual ideas seem indistinguishable from her choreographic (body-)practice. The relation between theory and practice in Ingvartsen's work resembles that of a Möbius-strip in which one thing turns into the other. The complex relation between both seems to be a symptom or specificity of 'contemporary dance' in general – yet this 'contemporary', often paralleled to the conceptual movement in dance, is not easy to grasp and should not be taken as historiographical category.<sup>20</sup> And yet, we would like to trace the present absence or absent presence in Ingvartsen's work by relating it to tactics of 'contemporary dance'; a topic which seems to be a constant motivator in Ingvartsen's thinking and choreographing.

The Serbian, Brussels-based dance and performance scholar Bojana Cvejic characterises the choreographic manoeuvres of Mette Ingvartsen and others as "unfolding a practice of thought" and refers to questioning "the body-movement bind with respect to expression and form" as a specific concern of contemporary dance (p. 1). Cvejic defines this tendency in terms of its procedures and questions: "methods of creation by a way of problem-posing which merits from philosophical attention" (p. 2).<sup>21</sup>

In a similar and yet different way, Cvejic's Brazilian-American colleague André Lepecki challenges the relation of thought and practice in 'contemporary' choreography – he relates it to procedures of the past, questioning the borders between modernity and postmodernity. He emphasizes the tendency to shatter established dance-techniques and their associated regimes since early 20<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes by using performance-art elements of distancing and disruption (in Cvejic 2015, p. 7). This opens up a different kind of relation to dance-history: Instead of building on styles and previous schools of movement, contemporary dance seems to refer to its own history critically, when citing and re-performing the procedures and methods.<sup>22</sup>

In the noughts, contemporary choreographers began to increasingly develop pieces with a historical concern.<sup>23</sup> Ingvartsen's Yes Manifesto, published in the performance journal *Maska* in 2005, responded to Yvonne Rainer's famous No Manifesto from 1965 (Ingvartsen 2005, p. 74).

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- 20) The terms "contemporary dance / choreography" used in this paper are not essentialist or positivist claims but approximate and relational terms. The problematic status of categorization see Osborne or Cramer.
  - 21) About contemporary concepts of choreography since the Neo-Avantgarde see also Brandstetter "Choreographie".
  - 22) For instance, by using improvisation techniques, as in works by Burrows and Ritsema. Or in the strategies of the Judson Dance Theatre, such as the use of tasks, cues and arrangements that produce unpredictable movement, reflecting forms of control and hierarchy. For an elaboration on the choreographic procedures between the arts in the 1960s see Butte, McGovern, Maar, Rafael and Schaffaff..
  - 23) Compare e.g. the pieces by Andrea Božić / Julia Willms (*After Trio A*, 2010) and Nicole Beutler (*Dialogue with Lucinda*, 2010, referring to *Radial Courses* (1976) and *Interior Drama*, 1976 by Lucinda Childs); pieces relating to works by the Judson generation. This can be seen in context with a general "archival turn" (Gabriele Brandstetter, "Museum in Transition") in theatre and dance; and the increasing interest in practices of re-enactment, re-performance and questions of preserving dance (see also exhibitions about the history of dance at the Centre Pompidou (*Danser sa vie*, 2011) or Haus der Kunst, München / Tate Modern, London (*Choreographing You*, 2011) or the different approaches to historiography and a 'performative archive' by Boris Charmatz (the *Musée de la danse* project, 2009 ongoing) or the *Moments*-Exhibition at the ZKM Karlsruhe (2012, curated by Sigrid Gareis, Boris Charmatz and Georg Schöllhammer).

Rainer's original had declared: "No to spectacle/ no to virtuosity/ no to transformations and make-believe/ no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image/ no to the heroic/ no to the antiheroic/ no to trash imagery/ no to involvement of performer or spectator (...)." (ibid.) Rainer's manifesto of course must be read in context of the postmodernist 1960s movement that was busy distancing itself from the Martha Graham-style of expressionist Modern Dance. Rainer and her Judson Church colleagues aimed at a neutral (non-)spectacle of the dancing body by transgressing the artistic limits of genre and artform. They collaborated with colleagues from other disciplines (John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg amongst others) and developed entirely new formats of presentations and developed choreography out of everyday movement, such as the pedestrian walk.

Ingvarsten uses the exploration of Rainer's work for revising the relation between theory and practice. Her manifesto-reply goes:

Yes to redefining virtuosity  
Yes to "invention" (however impossible)  
Yes to conceptualizing experience, affects, sensation  
Yes to the material investment of the body, or rather a bodypractice  
Yes to expression  
Yes to un-naming, decoding and recoding expression  
(...)  
Yes to organizing principles rather than fixed logic systems  
Yes to moving the "clear concept" behind the actual performance  
Yes to methodology and procedures  
(...)  
Yes to style as result of procedure and specificity of a proposal (...)  
Yes to multiplicity, difference and co-existence  
(Ingvarsten 2005, p. 74)

The list illustrates the shift in choreography and aesthetics. Fifty years after Rainer's No Manifesto, there is a clear decision to focus on the relationship to the audience through affect, experience, sensation, instead of denying it. But Rainer's manifesto can be read in ambivalent ways as well, bearing in mind the relation to the audience as much as Ingvarsten does. Nevertheless, Ingvarsten contrasts this radically and diametrically with a Yes, remaining in the same logic. She is perpetuating a will to emphasize conceptual, theoretical ideas which can be explored and used to create a certain style. This must be seen as a continuation of the Judson generation's practice.

In a literal reading, the "yes" to all possibilities suggests moving things towards a positive direction. Gone are the critiques and prohibitions. The Yes Manifesto marks a new socio-cultural context. Ingvarsten explains, that

*[to] say yes instead of no as a strategy is about defining an area of interest as positive, rather than a negation. We live in times of "everything is possible", so why not spectacle, virtuosity, glamour, style, involvement and so on..., why not moving and being moved as long as it is a choice and not a simply affirmation of the conventional procedures we already know. (Ingvarsten 2005, p. 74)*

And yet, second and third thoughts evoke the ambivalence of this endeavour. The Yes also mirrors neoliberal and performative imperatives of affirmation in times of crisis or economic and political

instabilities where there is no chance to create something new anymore: Everything has been thought, said and made in and outside the field of art. The constant Yes affirms and yet leaves and aftertaste of desperate self-affirmation and 'helplessness'. It might critique the "flexible working subject" in the sense of Italian Paris-living post-capitalism-theorists Maurizio Lazzarato or French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello. Is this manifesto written in times where maybe no manifesto can be written anymore an unveiling of the "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) of a global economic regime to perform?

### **Herself, Unfinished**

A portrait of Mette Ingvarstsen should maybe not be brought to a neat conclusion: Questions of agency and authorship pervade her work, and we have suggested to trace her in moments of bodily exhaustion, in physical quotations as well as in her conceptual presence in physical absence.

In her early body-related pieces Ingvarstsen's agency may appear to be compromised when she 'stays close to the quoted material' in what we described as her physical quotes; history 'flows' through her, apparently animating her body while distancing the movement from it. Her commentary on the performed actions confirms Ingvarstsen's authorial being in control of the performance. At the same time, like a Brechtian alienation effect, it reminds the spectator of the 'artificiality' of the situation, her being in the theatre, which creates a distance between the audience and the stories and events Ingvarstsen recollects through her body. Her nudity and explicitness, which could produce a sense of closeness or intimacy, are detached by the use of this epic commentary and quotation; here as elsewhere, the Brechtian strategy works to confront immersion with distance, presence with absence. In Ingvarstsen's later works, a sense of her 'human authorship' is palpable even in the 'bodiless' pieces and despite of the non-human action. What Lepecki refers to as scoring in choreography, the staging of "images conveyed by an authorial will" (Lepecki 2012, p. 15) and arranging thoughts and bodies, wilful behaviour and accidental movement in relation to each other, is evident in these works.

This portrait perhaps echoes the gesture of 69 Positions in which Ingvarstsen mimes a guide through an exhibition of stations and events in performance art. As mentioned above, Ingvarstsen recapitulates, relates and comments on some pieces, primarily from the 1960s, using modes of re-performance and also of explaining exhibited documents, such as photographs, videos, written sources. As German dance scholar Gabriele Brandstetter observes, Ingvarstsen "simulates historiography", putting a beginning, middle and end together to a whole in the sense of Aristotile; at the same time she uses the anecdote and unfinished, small stories against the grand récit of History (Brandstetter 2016). Interestingly, the second part of the performance is about her own performance work. She uses the same style and elements to relate, comment and refer to her own pieces in an unfinishing manner, creating shifts and lacks to be rewritten, actively writing herself in to an unfinished history. And again, we watch Ingvarstsen's performance as a narrator dissolve, only to see her re-emerge performing the performer. Next, that image vanishes and Ingvarstsen becomes the researcher, later the historiographer, only to start over again.

### **FAKTA**

Dancer and choreographer Mette Ingvarstsen was born 1980 in Aarhus. She graduated from the school of contemporary dance P.A.R.T.S (Brussels) in 2004 and completed an artistic PhD in choreography at UNIARTS (Stockholm) in 2016. From 2017 to 2022 she will be part of the artistic team at Volksbühne (Berlin), under the direction of Chris Dercon.

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