

TRIPTYCH

International Research Project 2010-2012

Triptych was a three-year international choreographic project hosted by the Operaestate Festival Veneto, Italy; Circuit-Est Centre Chorégraphique, Montreal; and The Dance Centre, Vancouver.

Each year, three choreographers were selected from each city to come together in each of the host cities in turn to undertake an intensive period of choreographic research and development, and to network with their peers in those artistic communities, under the guidance of dramaturge Guy Cools (2010) and rehearsal director Ginelle Chagnon (2011-12).

2010 artists:

Jennifer Clarke (Vancouver)
Emmanuel Jouthe (Montreal)
Chiara Frigo (Italy)

2011 artists:

James Gnam (Vancouver)
Jacques Poulin-Denis (Montreal)
Silvia Gribaudo (Italy)

2012 artists:

Ziyian Kwan (Vancouver)
Peter Trotzmer (Montreal)
Marco D'Agostin (Italy)

In 2012, Italian writer Giulia Galvan blogged about the project: triphyc.wordpress.com/

In 2011, writer Alana Gerecke documented the project in Vancouver:

Archiving Triptych By Alana Gerecke

Monday November 21, 2011



I join James Gnam, Silvia Gribaudo, Jacques Poulin Denis, and Guy Cools in the studio during their second week of research in Vancouver. Right away, I become acutely aware that the Vancouver installment of Triptych is

phase three in a three-phase project. A choreographic research project co-supported by the Opera Estate Festival Veneto (Italy), Circuit-Est Centre Chorégraphique (Montréal), and The Dance Centre (Vancouver), Triptych has already taken this group of three dancer-choreographers (James, Silvia, and Jaques) and their dramaturge, (Guy) to Bossano and Montreal in recent months. In each of these cities the artists have gathered with a mandate to experiment and explore; both the most challenging and refreshing component of this movement research process is that it does not culminate in a formal, final-product performance.

On this rainy Monday, we meet in EDAM Dance's studio space in the Western Front building – an old community hall turned artist-run centre. The sign hanging above the door to the studio reads:



The role of place in the Triptych crew's research is, it goes without saying, primary. But place has been of particular concern in Vancouver, where these artists have been migrating from studio to studio, based on availability of space in the midst of a very busy Dance in Vancouver rehearsal schedule. The warm wooden floors and the palpable feeling of history in the EDAM space inform the work.

After describing to me what they explored in Bossano and Montreal, the trio tells me that they had intended to pick up where they left off in Montreal, but when they got to Vancouver they found that they were simply – and perhaps predictably – in a different place. Jaques explains: "in Vancouver, we're not into that at all. We're kind of into..." he laughs, "we don't know what we're into."



Switching gears from recounting the trio's past choreographic curiosities to a focus on the present, James pulls out a bag full of groceries: seeds, corn nuts, sour keys, caramels – an assortment of munchies that he introduces piece by piece. He tells me that they are interested in what food might bring to their research. Specifically, they want to explore the ways in which food implicates the bodies of the audience members. To eat is to make physical a link between inside and outside, between the private, inner organs of the body and the public, external realm. What might this momentary but deeply felt collapse of outer into inner bring to a performance?

Tuesday November 22, 2011

After a fifteen minute improvisation wherein, for example, James dances a tender, tripping solo while Silvia and Jaques watch and apologize in broken and repeated niceties – "excuse me," "oops," "I'm sorry," "these things happen" – the three, with Guy contributing from the sidelines, return to a discussion of food. Silvia finds the input from the food within the improvisation overwhelming: the leaking can of soda she drinks, the pork puffs James tastes and attempts to feed to a handstanding Jaques. It is as though the food is another person, Silvia says, with its own set of suggestions and even demands within the already active improvisation.



The group spends some time discussing how working within temporal parameters – with a time limit – triggers a compositional mind. Within a twenty-minute long improvisation, they find themselves generating a beginning, a middle, and an end. The improvisations that are timed end up being, in James’ words, more “consumable” and “digestible.” They are more neatly packaged. (That the group discusses this idea while surrounded by a scattered array of food research materials seems apt: processed food, after all, is an everyday epitome of the ease of consumability and the high-gloss of appealing packaging.)

Wednesday November 23, 2011

Today, the trio is improvising when I arrive. Having spent two days at EDAM, we are back at The Dance Centre. In what has now become a familiar structure, the trio improvises on, around, and with three folding chairs. The three chairs anchor the improvisation, Silvia tells me. This is something they discovered in Italy, developed in Montreal, and carried to Vancouver. “It’s a place to start,” she says.



The practice today is structured by decreasing time allotments. Something like this: a twenty-minute improvisation followed by a ten-minute, and finally a five-minute improv. This structure, a “reduction,” has also been a thru line of the trio’s movement research for their six weeks of Triptych exploration.

Heading into a 20-10-5 series, Jaques, James and Silvia debate whether or not to include food. Where exactly the decision lands is unclear – and not just to me. As the conversation winds down, Silvia clarifies: “so, no food?” Jaques responds: “No. Yes. No.” But when James enters the space with a cup of chocolate covered espresso beans, the choice is made.



The beans sound like rain when they roll across the grey marley. In this rainy city, the sound is familiar, comfortable. The small, dark pieces are flung through the space: tossed at open mouths, aimed at turned backs and empty coffee cups, brushed aside by socked feet, flicked toward the edges of the room. These little beans roll and settle, forgotten for a spell before they are flicked, brushed, scooped up, tossed, and rolled again. Traces of movement stilled, they hold the space with both memory and possibility.

When the time is up, when the dancers are done, the studio is strewn with objects. Two empty cardboard coffee cups, three black folding chairs, and dozens of beans. The remnants of performance.



Thursday November 24, 2011

I arrive to learn that when the bag of food they had left behind at the end of yesterday's rehearsal was gone. The group has been going back-and-forth about the use of food throughout the week, so this presents an opportunity to have a food-free day. They reflect on how food – the little chocolate covered coffee beans that featured so prominently in yesterday's rehearsal – changes the relationships between the dancers. I ask how the explorations felt without food; Jaques responds: "I don't miss it, but I want it back."

They discuss what they plan to share at tomorrow's studio showing. They decide to decide tomorrow. They discuss the merits and complexities of finishing their show with a talkback session. Jaques sums up his sense of things: "it's important, I think, to have an exchange about it. Even if just to validate that something happened here, you know?"

Friday November 25, 2011

Today, in the thick of the Dance in Vancouver programming, The Dance Centre is filled with easy-come, easy-go, informal studio showings. Shortly after 1pm, viewers/audience members drift into the studio and find a spot to sit on the floor or on a folding chair set up around the perimeters of the space. Although there is a condensed cluster of viewers seated along one wall, there is no front.

After a description of what the trio has been researching during their Triptych exploration generally, and in Vancouver specifically – they launch into their “reduction” score: a twenty minute improvisation, followed by a ten minute condensation, and by a further five minute reduction.



The three stages of the improvisation reference one another, but never entirely repeat. The first and longest improvisation features a reoccurring song with the refrain, “I’m boring; I’m boring; I’m very, very boring,” where “boring” is a placeholder later swapped out for “sexy,” “attractive,” and “interesting,” among other adjectives. This phase of the improv ends with Silvia and Jaques play-kissing in a corner of the space while James watches with seeming disdain.

In the ten-minute improv, the corn nuts make an appearance – in fact, they end up all over the floor – and the improv ends with Jaques deferring his physicalized promise to aim a corn nut into James’ mouth from across the room.





In the final improv of the set, the artists distribute paper cups of soy nuts amongst the audience (I hear murmurs of “good – I was hungry!” around me) and three cans of soda make their way into the dance space. This final section ends with a strange and satisfying anticlimax: following the build-up of a vigorously shaken pop can, the can is opened to a meager fizz. The anticlimax reads of the faces of the dancers, who clearly expected more drama, but they agree: “it’s an ending.” And it is.



Guy, James, Silvia, and Jaques invite viewers to stick around for a talkback session. The discussion turns quickly to an exploration of “the permission to fail,” and how this permission can serve the creative process. When pressed to define “failure,” each has a slightly different response. But they agree this process allowed them to pursue choices that didn’t immediately feel interesting; something that, when pressured to create a final product, they likely wouldn’t spend time exploring. During this process, where exploration itself is the final product, the artists felt freedom to spend time developing ideas and propositions they might not have bothered with otherwise. Which is one good way to access work you haven’t seen before or made before – to arrive somewhere new.

As an artist, you can’t help but respond to your creative environment, and so the work you make pivots on the interests that preoccupy your artistic community. It is in gaining distance from your context by traveling or by working with artists from other communities – an underlying idea of the Triptych project – that you get a chance to think and move your way into different communities and different concerns. And this dis or replacement allows you to see more clearly what it is that you are interested in investigating. Out of your context, you are able to see what’s left behind.

