

In March this year Pere Faura presented *Discopolis*, a work that deals with live video in the theatre. Below I will explore how this work can be seen within the context of Pere's continued attempts over four years to investigate the possibilities and meanings that live video can bring to dance and the theatre. In particular Pere has worked with video to explore the sensation of 'liveness', showing the very constructions with which video creates a sense of presence. The 'liveness' also implies its opposite, absence: the way theatre promises a meeting, but at the same time creates a gap between performer and spectator that cannot be overcome. Theatre then becomes an affirmation of a deeply felt solitude. *Door Jeroen Fabius*

LIVE VIDEO IN WORKS LEADING UP TO **DISCOPOLIS** BY PERE FAURA

PLOUGHING THE LOT

EXPLORATIONS IN LIVE VIDEO IN THE THEATRE

Discopolis is an extension of the investigations that Pere has been conducting since the very first year of his studies at the School for New Dance Development. Pere and I have collaborated on a number of these works and I have been able to follow the development of his work over the years. There is a surprising and tenacious consistency to the work in which he explores live video and recorded video in a variety of possible combinations with choreography. At the end of his career, the television writer Dennis Potter (well known for the six part television drama *The Singing Detective* in the 1980s, amongst other things) was asked how the range of his work was always centred on a limited number of issues. Some characters and themes were repeated in different works, and even entire story lines returned in new versions over the years. He said that we all have just so much to work with; we all just plough a relatively small lot of land. It is funny to think that Pere, who is only 26, might be like that. But perhaps in his case it is different, and it is more like a step-by-step, piecemeal exploration of his interest in our ways of dealing with reality.

'And tomorrow because of the salads'

This was the title of the piece that Pere created in 2003, and which was a little bit longer than the 10 minutes he was allowed according to the production rules of the school at the time. As a form of punishment (or perhaps reward), he was obliged to remake the piece and demonstrate that he was able to deal with production conditions. He made this piece in a week, out of pure rage, and it turned out to be a pearl. In the space there was a VCR player, a monitor, and a beamer, which were all operated by Pere during the performance. The visible presence of the equipment, and the manipulations, created transparency in the way video technology was used as part of the performance. The monitor and the beamer were operated with a button, allowing us to see one thing at a time, the monitor or the projected image on the wall. The monitor showed a clock because he did need to adhere to the 10-minute rule after all, which was the one and only reason for this presentation. As an additional acknowledgement of the special occasion, the director and production-manager of the school were placed on a high platform so that they could oversee and witness

these facts. The piece consisted of Pere dancing live with a recording of the original duet that he had made with a dancer some months before projected by the beamer onto the wall. Each time that it was his turn to dance he would join the video projection; during the moments that the other person was dancing he could go and check the time. In this solo, or duet with a virtual dancer, he had to race between the clock and the recorded duet projected onto the wall behind him to be able to execute the duet and check the duration of the piece.

As spectators, we were drawn into both the fictional duet of Pere dancing with his recorded partner on the video projection and into the reality of the passing time. He reminded us of both realities, which existed at the same time, but exclusively. They opposed each other. With one push of the button he switched the projected image from one to the other reality. These two states of reality revealed different dimensions of space and time that could exist within the theatre, and also in our imagination. The dance with the projected images created a fiction of a duet, in which physical and virtual presences were combined. At the same time it referred to the real history of this piece that was beyond the here and now, it was a recording of the previous version of the same choreography that he was dancing for us. The video of the clock made us aware of the 'real time,' and the real setting, and the politics of production within the school that determined the event. The piece illustrated how we continuously negotiate various realities, both in the present and in the past, simultaneously, and how the 10-minute time rule invaded this negotiation as an inevitable symbol of authority. The live manipulation of recorded video played an essential role in showing how we operate with these presences and absences.

Panoramas 2

Panoramas 2 (2005) illustrated the construction of a live video event, i.e. the manipulation of the recording of the event itself. As the title suggests it showed us views, and possible views, of a choreography that was repeated three times, and every time we saw it differently through interventions of video. Once again Pere worked with transparent manipulations of video technology on the stage. Whereas *and tomorrow, etc* showed us how we negotiate different realities in the present, *Panoramas 2* constructed ways for us to look at one event and perceive different co-existing realities. In that process we became part of the theatrical event, and thus part of the multiple co-existing realities too.

In this piece we saw three dancers 'at work', setting up the event on the stage. By means of theatre lights, a video beamer and a camera on a tripod, a spatial setting was created where the dancing took place. Once they had completed the setting up, they executed the choreography three times and each time was different. Firstly, the camera on the tripod was upstage, pointed towards the spectators behind the dancers that were executing the choreography, but there was no image projected. In the second part, the camera was moved down stage in front of the dancers; the beamer projected live close ups of their dancing. The third time that the dancers performed the choreography we saw the recording of the first time projected onto the back screen. The projection was life size, the projected image covered the entire width of the stage, including the live dancers, and created a dou-

bling of the recorded and the live stage. It took a while to understand what was happening, how we were seeing a recording of a previous moment and not a live projection from the camera positioned in front of the dancers. And we could contrast the third version of the live dance with the first version on the video, puzzling as to how the different dimensions communicated with each other: the two dimensions of the screen, with the three dimensions of the live figures, the mixing up of left and right, as the recording was made from behind, which therefore reversed the direction of our gaze. And importantly, due to the reversal of the gaze, we saw the entire seating area and ourselves with all the other spectators as we watched the first version. We had become part of the performance.

The third version finally seemed to bring the piece to the point that had long eluded the spectator. By this stage it was clear that all that was happening was functioning to make us aware of the fact that we were there together, merely so that this could all take place. We had become part of the event. Theatre creates a space for people to come together. It seems that the dance had taken on a sort of relay function; it had not demanded much reading. It had made us aware of the room, of the fact that the entire space was filled with energy and the presence of moving bodies, just like any dance would. But dance does not represent emotional messages or states; it just 'does' something. Just like the action of setting up the space with the equipment. The theatre is a place of promise; by 'just doing' dance postpones a sense of revelation of what it might be about. In this case, it was the video that delivered the promise that created the moment of revelation about what the piece was proposing. *Panoramas 2* gave us the opportunity to see one event in different ways, and involved the spectator as part of the event; theatre was shown to be a place of multi-layered gathering.

This is a picture of somebody I don't know

The inclusion of the audience by the use of video augments the sense of gathering, of shared co-presence, which is so essential to the theatre. The jewel in the piece *This is a picture of a person I don't know* (2006) was a scene in which a recording of a member of the audience was shown. She, or he, would be recorded for 40 seconds during the performance with a video camera that looked more like a photo camera. So we did not expect to see the footage appear later on as a video close up projected onto the back screen. The moment of filming was already intense in itself. Pere would single out one spectator for 40 seconds and then point the camera at him or her. This person would be surprised and uncomfortable and try to maintain decorum throughout the entire stretch of time, which seemed endless. While the camera physically produced the close up by means of the lens, you could say that the individual's embarrassment doubled the sense of intimacy in the close up. When we saw the projection later in the performance, Pere described what we saw in words, while he looked at us, not at the screen. In fact, while he was looking at us and not at the projection, he tried to remember what he saw while he was filming the person. The scene created gaps between what was happening in the projections and the words describing what we could see. Pere spoke about factual things that he remembered, the awkward face of the person in question becoming red with embarrassment or starting to smile uncomfortably.



bly, the moving of his or her hands for comfort. But he also spoke about what he thought the person was thinking. The timing of his descriptions and what we were able to see did not coincide. Together, all this created an eerie sense of 'liveness' that I have rarely witnessed with video in the theatre before. The sensation of the recorded version was extremely 'live', i.e. it was as if the depth of emotion and the intimacy created by this scene was happening in the 'here and now' even though we knew it was recorded earlier. We had been present when he filmed this person, but that was minutes ago. The 'here' was clearly established; the 'now' was entirely confused. Video warps our sense of time by returning previous moments to the here and now.

This is a picture told a story: about a man who is alone and seeks company. The piece was both an audition and a proposition. It started out with footage from the film *Chorus Line*, in which Michael Douglas as the director auditions dancers and tells them what is expected of them. Pere, however, said that this time he wanted to be the choreographer of his own life and love. It was a complicated woven structure of monologue, and even dialogue with his alter ego, recorded footage made before the public entered and video footage of famous films, including *Singing in the Rain*, which ended in an unresolved attempt to overcome his loneliness. The collage of a wide range of materials allowed the spectator to engage with a wealth of associations, but also created the puzzle of sorting out the narrative of this lonely soul looking for a lover.

At the end of the piece we saw a dialogue between Pere and his video alter ego that ended when the audience was seen entering on the video screen. Some of them recognised themselves, we also saw how we joined him in that room. Once again time was warped; at the end of the story the piece leapt back to the moment that we entered the room. Very confusing. It seemed to express the impossibility of him meeting with us, with his lover, of closing the unbridgeable gap between performer and audience. The dialogue with his alter ego was a declaration of love in the last resort to his own alter ego, after he had given up trying to find love with others. The gap towards the audience could not be bridged, but was made impossible forever. The video carried us back to where the show began that very same evening that we arrived, implicating us in this impossibility. We were back where we had started. We too, the spectators, couldn't do anything to get closer to the performer that evening. If the theatre was a place of loneliness for Pere, then it was for all of us, we were part of the game as much as he was; we were made to look at ourselves as part of his act. This was not the first time in Pere's work that this had occurred, but this time the video focused on the gap and the impossibility of overcoming that gap between the performer and the spectator, and showed the great desire to overcome it that is so important in making theatre.

Discopolis

Discopolis (2007) built upon *This is a picture*, and earlier pieces when constructing 'liveness' and now focused on the gap that *This is a picture* had laid bare. For this piece Pere organised a party. An event outside the work became part of the project. Afterwards there was some discussion about how important the party was, or wasn't, and how it only achieved the status of a

failed party. The people who came to the party were the absent world in the composition, all the people he was not dancing with. But we saw them filmed in the very same room, they were projected on very nearly the same spot that the dancing took place during the recording, it made their absence all the more poignant.

The piece began with the gradual introduction of the various elements that would create a sensation of the presence of partygoers, of the party, the party in a discotheque. We entered an empty room that looked like a disco; we even saw a video of a deejay playing music for us. Then we were directed to sit in an adjacent room, which was separated by curtains, and we looked onto the room we were in; now it had become a theatre.

Pere came in and started to dance to the music. That was the piece. All we could see was one figure dancing for the entire duration of the piece. The presence of this single body was clearly stated, it did not move from its place. It performed a kind of dancing we all know well from the discotheque. It had its highs and lows; it changed its themes with the phrasing of the music. You could call this a 'documentary' approach to choreography; once again it merely asked us to look and did not attempt to construct its own narrative. Pere made us look at the disco dancing for an extended period of time, to zoom in or out and bear witness to this familiar reality. As Pere continued to dance, the elements of the party were gradually added, or taken away. Two performers, Naiara and Jefta operated the lights and the sound to the right and left of the space. Again the technology was visible and the interventions were transparent. At first there was only a very bland light, then it became more atmospheric, then the stroboscope was added. Thereafter the video of the dancing partygoers was introduced, and would remain for the duration. At some point the music stopped and there was just the sound of people dancing, their feet stamping, and their voices cheering. And later the music speeded up, and the video projection of people dancing, the energy of partying increased but the paradox widened even more, the binary of the sensation of presence and absence was felt more and more. This was not a real party, or discotheque, even though that was all we were watching. Finally, Pere was replaced by another dancing body, Naiara. She took over from Pere in very much the same way, just by dancing to the music.

We were not supposed to identify with the dancer on a psychological level, but just with the energy, the waves moving through the body. During the piece we did not remain focused on this dancer, our minds drifted and moved away from him. Very much like in the disco, we perceived time differently, we were in a 'sea of time,' where waves carried us back and forth to what we saw, perceived, thought, associated; it was the kind of freedom that is so pleasurable when one goes out, no more linear time. The physical presence was undeniable, but what the piece wanted to communicate was the experience of varying sensations of presence, and disappearance. How was it possible that we could forget about this dancing figure, and was that a problem? He was the only character. What else was there?

With the introduction of the elements of light, sound and video, and even replacing a dancer, the space was constructed as a

DISCOPOLIS

CONCEPT & PERFORMANCE PERE FAURA
PERFORMANCE JEFTA VAN DINTHER & NAIARA
MENDIOROZ
VIDEO ADNAN HASOVIC
DRAMATURGY JEROEN FABIUS

PERE FAURA (BARCELONA 1980) GRADUATED IN 2006 AT THE SCHOOL FOR NEW DANCE DEVELOPMENT (SNDO). AS A DANCER HE HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN SEVERAL PROJECTS WITH CHOREOGRAPHERS LIKE JEROME BEL, IVANA MULLER, CAROLIEN HERMANS AND NORA HELMAN. AS A CHOREOGRAPHER, HE HAS PRESENTED PANORAMAS, VIDEO AND DANCE, I BELONG TO YOUR IMAGE, SEQUENCE OF PANORAMAS, SOLO AND THIS IS A PICTURE OF A PERSON I DON'T KNOW IN DIFFERENT THEATRES AND FESTIVALS AROUND HOLLAND AND INTERNATIONALLY HE RECEIVED THE AWARD FOR BEST CHOREOGRAPHY OF THE ITS FESTIVAL 2006.

party space, a disco, a temple to the celebration of happiness, where real happiness seems to be absent. Once again we were looking at a deliberate construction, and we perceived the moments of intensity as live even though we were looking at recordings of people who were no longer in the room, and at the same time we were continually aware of the constructed nature. When we heard only the stamping and shouting of the dancing crowd in the room, they felt present, or when the music became upbeat and the cheering in Pere's dancing rose, we could empathise with this impossible attempt to achieve a party. The sentiment was there, but only to share, to look at the dislocated disco dancing. This solo performance became an ultimate test of presence, in which presence disappeared, dissolved. This is when the spectator also becomes part of the event, when becoming aware of his own role as a witness. Ultimately, this piece also tried to overcome the division, tried to overcome the status of being theatre, but failed.

Ploughing the lot

Video has been a persistent element in the work of Pere Faura. With each piece, he has explored different expressive possibilities. In particular he has explored the use of video in the exploration of the unbridgeable gap between the performer and the spectator. As close and intimate as *This is a person* promised to be, it merely displayed the impossibility more greatly. Meanwhile, the spectator became explicitly and visibly part of the performances because of the fact that they were filmed and projected during the performance. The paradox of being together and being lonely at the same time gradually seemed to be resolved by each piece in a new way. And the plot thickens; his next work is entitled *striptease*. ■



Robert Longo - Men in the city

A single, isolated figure, enlarged to epic proportions, stylishly dressed but stripped of any background or context, Eric is an almost life-size lithograph by super-realist artist Robert Longo of an earlier untitled work from his series, *Men in the City*.

Eric depicts a young white man spinning violently out of control. Longo achieved this effect by working from photographs he took of friends on the roof of his loft near the financial district in New York City. Reportedly he hurled objects at them to get the desired responses, thus the theatrical 'poses'. He then projected the photographs larger than life onto the wall and sketched the images.

Longo has been called a media artist in his liberal use of seduction and drama. Influenced by movies, his works tend to tower above the viewer.

In his early 30's when he created his series of young urban men, Longo said it was about the 'loneliness of being alone. You're always alone, no matter if you are in a room full of people, you're always going to be alone.' (bron: www.wfu.edu/art/ac_longo_eric.htm)

Programme Text for *Discopolis* by Pere Faura

*When absence can only become a celebration.
The celebration of an empty house. I dance
to imagine you dancing with me. A one-man
party.*

*Partying as a means to escape
Escaping as the creation of absence
Absence as the illusion of presence
Presence as the end of loneliness
Loneliness as the end*

Partying as means to escape the end

*When theatre can only become a party.
The dance of an empty stage. I celebrate
your imagination. A two-way conversation.*

*Theatre as a means to escape
Escaping as the creation of absence
Absence as the illusion of presence
Presence as the end of loneliness
Loneliness as the end*

Theatre as a means to escape the end