

THE INESCAPABLE HERE AND NOW

Reflections on *Do You Have a Cigarette? And Other Ways of Approaching* by Pere Faura

Human contact – if one theme runs through the work of choreographer, dancer and performer Pere Faura it would be this. In his productions, he always makes an earnest attempt to enter into a direct relationship with his audience, if only to demonstrate the limitations of such attempts. In his latest choreography he starts from disco, the first dance in history that is performed by a group of individuals each dancing alone. Volume asked actor, opera singer and professor of psychology Jens Förster to reflect on this experience of collective loneliness.

By Jens Förster

As a social psychologist, I do not believe in objective points of view. Perception is based on both the external event in front of me and myself, including my expectations, goals, emotions and bodily sensations: perception is based on the world out there and my own history. Events bring up certain aspects of my own history; in other words, they activate different thoughts and feelings in everybody – the combination between me and the event is the perception. I learned from my research another lesson: that perspectives are malleable and quite flexible and that without getting personal, evaluating something does not make sense at all.

Disco reminds me of my childhood in Germany, more specifically in East Westphalia, where having fun is a sin and working a virtue. There was only one disco in my home town which had a bad reputation: there were rumors about drugs and prostitution, but this was of course a construal by overprotecting parents. Even in the 90s, a club was still a place parents were concerned of: it tasted of revolution, sex and drugs. I did not like popular music when I was going through puberty. I saved all my money to buy a stereo, but the first record was – no joke – *the Flying Dutchman* by Wagner. I played the music loudly, so that neighbors had to become angry. I danced to Wagner, danced the boredom away; I still dance to classical music. Pere Faura won me over when the performance started with a lonely woman dancing to Haydn's trumpet concert. This was a personal moment for me. It was unexpected. I cannot dislike this evening.

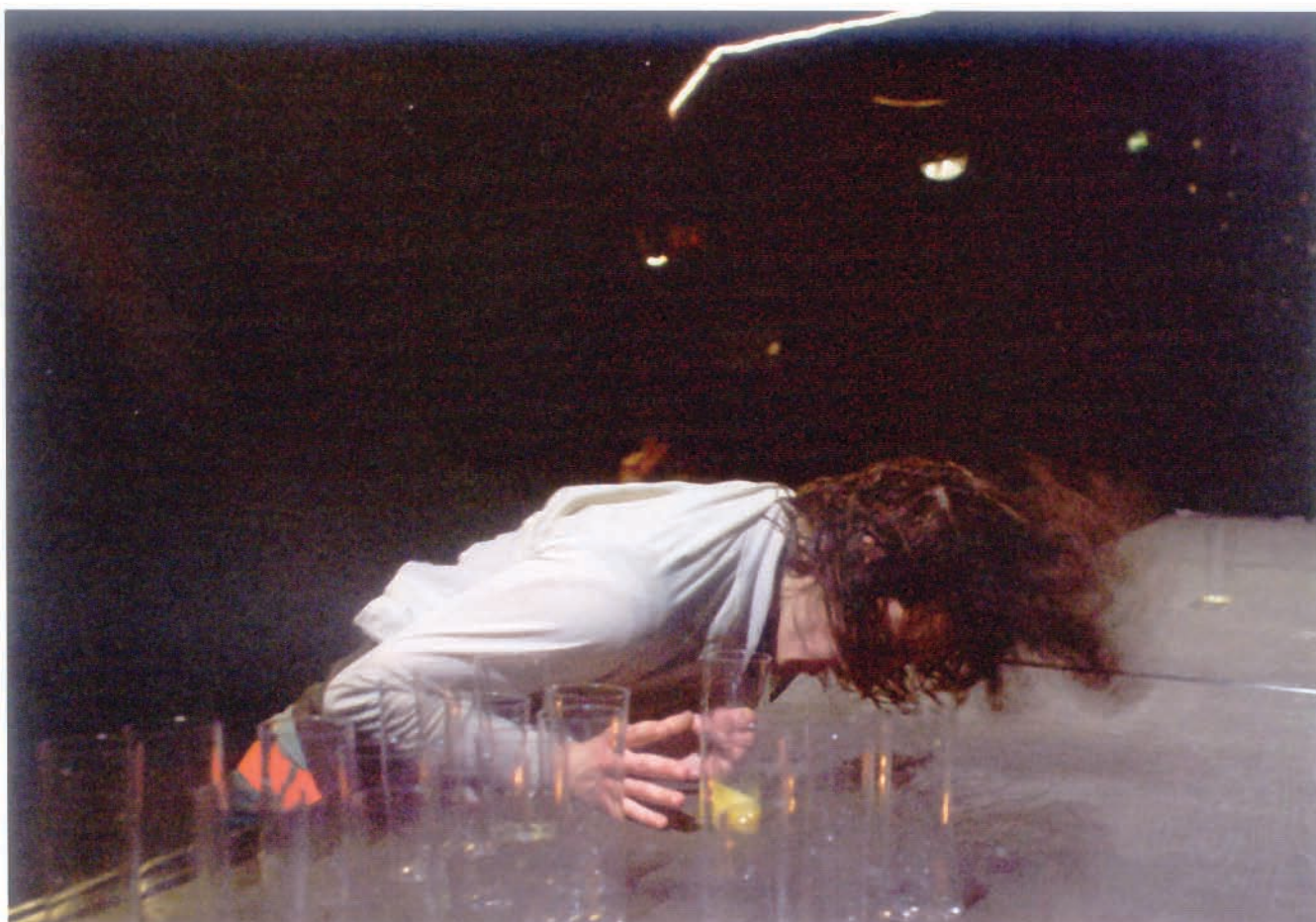
Of course I went to the disco when I was young. During puberty, I spent some time in Bayeux, France, where everybody went to 'boums'. These were usually located in quite shitty rooms, clumsily decorated halls of schools or even churches, some colored headlights trying hard to produce some atmosphere, and the music was loud. The room at Frascati was a bit like that: uninspired black walls, people sitting on treads, with the music, the lights and the bar being the most important ingredients. Discos are rarely stable places. The cool stuff takes place in the subculture and the subculture moves, changes, transforms itself from one black place to another. Some black snail shell, where the greatest DJ resides who will die

Jens Förster

Jens Förster studied psychology, German literature, linguistic data processing and philosophy in Trier and opera and performing arts in Saarbrücken. He directed and wrote several plays and works as a solo chansonnier and actor. He became Professor of Psychology in 2000 and is Hoogleraar at the University of Amsterdam since 2007.

Pere Faura

Pere Faura (Barcelona 1980) graduated in 2006 at the School for new dance development (SNDO) with *This is a picture of a person I don't know*. This production won him the IT's Festival Choreography Award. As a choreographer, he has presented his work in different theatres and festivals around Holland and internationally. As a dancer he has been involved in several projects with choreographers like Jérôme Bel, Ivana Müller, Carolien Hermans and Nora Helman. His most recent productions include *Do you have a cigarette?* (2008), *Striptease* (2008) and *Discopolis* (2007). See also www.perefaura.com.



Do you have a cigarette? And Other
Ways of Approaching. Foto Annette Kamerich



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after one successful season. I remember that when I was young I hated the music but I wanted to get a girlfriend. You dance, try to look cool, some fucking clumsy steps, some asinine gazes but, anyway – there's your first kiss.

Some sociologists say mating is the root of dancing or in other words that dancing is a means to get laid. Obviously, many people get their first kiss in a disco. You go to the disco to have sex. This sounds like a truism, but look at all the birds that dance! Dancing: so easy to explain. I've heard some scientists say that the link between dancing and mating is even biological. I doubt it. I cannot remember that I ever approached a dancer just because of his or her cute dance. I do not remember any good dancer that I kissed. At the age of four you realize that there is no Santa Claus, at the age of 14 it becomes clear that there is no Travolta and no Olivia waiting for you. Faura's dancers invited us to dance with them. Of course it did not work. We felt embarrassed compared to them. We've never seen such beautiful dancing on a dance floor. But the audience is always the worst actor, audience participation always fails for this reason. I generally despise it. However, there is no case in which it would be more out of place than within a disco dancing performance with professional dancers. Was this just a bad idea, or even an ingenious, malicious way to show us our own helplessness?

Faura misled us with the title. We kept waiting for the male dancers to come, but they never appeared. How many times did we leave the disco without Travolta or Olivia? This was the nice and disturbing aspect of the evening. Five women danced, mostly on their own. Even though the evening was called *Do you have a cigarette? And other ways of approaching* the performance had little to do with sex or mating routines (there were some prototypical moves like two girls dancing with another in a sexy, pseudo-lesbian way, but still self-absorbed). The evening showed many lonely people; if the dancers would have been dressed in black one would have been reminded of Nietzsche's notion of loneliness being the basis of existence, loneliness that is the incurable wound on the surface of our lives. The irony is that it hurts even there, on the dance floor. Yet, loneliness on the dance floor is mostly tolerable. Everybody dances for him or herself; that's not trivial if you look at dances across the ages where people danced in pairs or groups.

Remember that disco dancing meant to support a revolution. People met to dance with each other, but said goodbye to stiff dancing rules – freestyle replaced the standard synchronized dancing routines. Chaos replaced order. Social psychologists and cultural historians speculated about the meaning of synchronized activities (such as in dancing, choir singing and military marching). One theory, for example, holds that various communities

benefit from the actual physical synchrony – or 'muscular bonding' – which builds group cohesiveness. Another idea is that synchronous activities lead to 'collective effervescence' – positive emotions that break down the boundaries between self and group. It seems that disco dancing broke the common obvious link between the military and dancing. Make peace not war. Make love not war. While still bolstering ingroup emotions (we are opposing the bourgeois, we are the cool guys), anybody could wave the arms the way he or she liked it. I saw many funny moves this evening and liked them. I remembered that once I was called the windmill (again, no kidding – there might be a reason why I moved to the Netherlands).

Sometimes, individualism is a bad idea. The here and now and the focus on oneself can inescapably depress us. Sometimes, one crashes at the disco big time. When the dancers go to the toilet and we see them vomiting, shitting, taking drugs, trying to imitate the perfection of an MTV video, still wearing their ridiculous clothes, Nietzsche's wound starts burning. While the dancers were singing 'sweet dreams' into the bathroom mirror I heard my Wagnerian chords instead. The powerful sounds that made me aware of the unavoidable voidness of life. There is no Santa Claus, there is no Travolta, the only one who is there for sure is you.

I still go to the disco. I turned gay in the meantime and meanwhile I even like music that is harder than Jacques Brel's *Ne me quitte pas*. I like to go out sometimes to watch people and to see fancy new clubs. While discos in the gay scene were a common place focusing on the mating business, actually, the internet replaced the open stage. Some discos had to close because of this. In order to explain this, I guess scientists have to come up with an inborn link between internet and mating instead. Interestingly, people do still dance.

We are vulnerable, the disco is no safe place, not any more. The bouncers make their selection, nothing worse than being sent back at your 30th birthday. The disco is a vulnerable place itself. We are reminded by Faura that while the disco gives all the freedom to us, this is not what everybody accepts. Not only in Tel Aviv, Berlin or Bali have discos been the target of the new so called revolutionaries, replacing our peaceful revolution by pure terror. This was the most surprising association of this performance, but it is a real one. The dark shell is no place to protect yourself any more. Unless you just dance the fear away.

Pere Faura – Do you have a cigarette? And other ways of approaching

Concept and choreography Pere Faura
Performers Naiara Mendioroz Azcarate, Kyung-Sun Baek, Nina Fajdiga, Barbara Meneses Gutiérrez and Therese Øvstebø Markhus