

The Art of Entertainment

Lea Moro and Cristina Caprioli about artistic careers and the importance of taking entertainment seriously.

Interview: Esther Boldt



Cristina Caprioli's new work "A Line_up" deconstructs the format of the musical, whilst Lea Moro's "FUN!" looks into the subversive potential of enjoyment. A conversation about working conditions, critical points in artistic careers – and about the importance of taking entertainment seriously.

Esther Boldt: *To get to know each other a bit: what are the starting points of your work? What inspires you?*

Cristina Caprioli: It is a question of embracing and being challenged by how to articulate language for itself and how to inhabit and populate the body, the space of the stage, of the studio or the street with meaning that has been articulated, that is interested in being precise, in being alert, in paying attention to politics, to social environments, to recognising the circumstances that we all live in and to speaking to these circumstances. It is a kind of writing and speaking, an urge.

EB: *When you are speak about language, do you mean choreography?*

CC: In the last two, three years, I have just been saying for me, choreography is a choir that inscribes itself within the world. But it is always collective, it is always a choir, and it is a writing, speaking, doing thing. It is not moving in space and time, that's really an obsolete description. It is the articulation of gestures, it is participating in a discourse, but it is also re-arranging the discourse for a choir. And the particular choir I am working with is a dissonant choir, a choir that recognises and allows a difference of voices that are all engaged in one and the same discourse, in one and the same script, one and the same score. It's not only responding to or commenting on the environment we are inhabiting, but is actually putting something on the table, it is presenting something, it is daring to speak. I mean, the act of performing a choreography on

stage is tricky, because it is totally embedded in the event of the spectacle – in more or less extreme or commercialised ways. But you cannot avoid it. And that is the trickiest part of all, dealing with that and keeping the articulation.

Lea Moro: Are you working for stages or for other spaces?

CC: Other spaces, lately, and last year I arranged my own spaces collectively, where the moment of bringing to display or sharing in public is not inscribed in the exchange economy of the stage.

EB: *Lea Moro, how would you describe your way of working?*

LM: We are at very different moments in our pathways of choreography and in our career, so I would like to describe a bit where I'm coming from. I studied at Accademia Teatro Dimitri, where you learn acrobatics, masque plays and singing, and in the end, you have a bit of everything. But I always wanted to go further with the body and with dance, so I went to LABAN Centre in London for a year, which was a very different institution. And then it happened that I landed here, in Berlin, at the newly founded interdisciplinary center for dance, the Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz. In my final year of studying, I took a chance by responding to HAU Hebbel am Ufer's open call for young choreographers to mark the 100th anniversary of "Le Sacre du Printemps" in 2013. I would never have done a "Sacre" myself, but I took this possibility of doing it.

EB: *How did you approach this iconic piece?*

LM: I decided to do a solo to Stravinsky's music and to dance the whole ensemble of Nijinsky's ballet by myself. And I just enjoyed it very much. I realised that I am fascinated by working with given structures like a classical composition, because I can find my own logic within it. I give myself tasks like "how can the singular body embody the whole ballet ensemble?" and "how can I make choreographies to classical music?". The solo "Le Sacre du Printemps, a ballet for a single body" was very well received, so I got the opportuni-

ty to do my first group piece, "(b)reaching stillness", which was the result of a long-time interest in baroque still life paintings. How do they relate to the viewer, and how is stillness being animated? I chose Gustav Mahler's "Resurrection Symphony", a composition that is driven by constant dynamic changes, and thought of the contrast with the inherent slowness and stillness of these paintings. So I am interested in creating a space where different components can co-exist, and how the body can find its place in that. I take these things as tasks to challenge myself. With my new work "FUN!", the process feels different, I'm not working with a given musical composition, for example, which is interesting and challenging, and it might create something different – at least this is how it feels while creating this work right now. My work developed quite quickly in the last three years, and now is a crucial moment for me. How to continue with the work, being in the theatre system? Which is the next step to take, how to progress? I feel like I have to re-articulate myself.

You are taking your surrounding seriously and then you concentrate on one thing.

CC: Yes, we are from different generations, you are at the beginning, I am at the end, but I think that what you're saying is really what I was also trying to say with the writing and the speaking, that choreography is no longer a kind of expression of something that can't be said in words or the creation of a piece, it's really a continuous paying attention to what is there, whether it is Stravinsky or a musical, and to respond to it. So, you are taking your surrounding seriously and then you concentrate on one thing. You are not expressing yourself through the movement, no! Movement is the activity.

LM: My interest is to continue working with some collaborators that I have been sharing my process and work with during the last few years. I feel like the time-frame of a project is too short, considering

all the things that need to be mastered from the beginning to the end. I am a bit exhausted by these frames, and I am interested in re-articulating myself and in finding other ways to work in order to extend the collaborations and to build another language.

CC: I certainly understand your problem of never having enough time to pursue things. Choreography should not be a product for the stage, it needs to be a current going-on. This idea of packaging the work for the stage and then moving on to another one, it's not productive for development.

EB: *What is productive then?*

CC: For me it has become absolutely necessary to keep working on one topic, I just name it differently, but I keep working on the same thing. In a sense, I have been able to keep one and the same thematic interest through five different projects, but they are also developing differently. I am old, and I have nothing to lose anymore. And I have learned not to be stressed by this demand that it should be something new, that it should be something else. To me, that's the work, not to cut off.

LM: I totally understand. I mean, there are always tendencies that we take further, but sometimes I would like to disrupt myself more, to do something that I don't yet know how to do. Like my musical "The End of the Alphabet" for example, for which I learnt roller-skating and singing. But I also feel that this constant project rhythm sometimes becomes a trap, a trap of re-invention.

EB: *Cristina, you mentioned earlier that you're not only working in theatre spaces, but in other ones?*

CC: Yes, we found a beautiful space that is going to be torn down. It was an office space, but very large. So it was neither a museum nor a theatre, it had none of those connotations, it's very rough. We did two seasons so far, and it has been very gratifying and very successful. And there is another thing: I never charge a ticket. For me, it was very important to cut this

basic rule of how the interaction between performer and audience takes place. The basic contract for this event of sharing doesn't really fit the kind of demanding invitation that choreography is. You have to understand me right, I feel super radical more and more, but it's within my field, it's within my context. I don't think that the whole world should function like this. I am totally okay with commercial things, but I also like to see things that are different. To maintain difference, and not homogenise all culture within this logic. Which leads me to the question of entertainment.

EB: *Yes! I am very curious to hear about that, because contemporary dance is not known as being entertaining, and yet both of you are showing pieces at Tanz im August that deal with entertainment. Cristina, your new piece "A Line_up" deals with the musical "A Chorus Line", and Lea, you went into theme parks to do research on how fun is created and how the body produces fun. Why are these issues interesting for you?*

I am really interested in this place of "Zweckfreiheit".

LM: For me, the topic of fun came out of the simple question: when do I have fun? What does it mean to me? And how does it get mixed up with the work I am doing? What is actually the place of having fun and what is shared there? In this sense, the fun parks came in as territories, as closed structures that do actually claim that that's where the fun is happening. There is also the question if fun is something that is being done for self-optimisation? Or is a place of fun something which is "zwecklos", like this German word says, something without a purpose and without an outcome? I am really interested in this place of "Zweckfreiheit".

EB: *But to find this "Zweckfreiheit" you went into a place where fun is not without a purpose.*

LM: Maybe in the end no kind of fun is free from a purpose. Maybe. But I think looking for a form of fun that is more 'zweckfrei' opens up a personal realm of experiencing and questioning my surroundings.

Something that is not easily nameable or graspable. A funny sensation that is different for everybody. We are five performers, and we do not understand fun in the same way, but we share a common terrain.

EB: *What exactly is the material you are working with?*

LM: We have an old glossary of fun rides like "Moon Rocket", "Lollipop Lagoon", "Tunnel of Love". We took these names for improvisations, for scenic material, for stimulations, for the body to dive into associations and sensations. We have been dealing with embodiments of the rides like being the driller or being on a ride, with the sensation for example the drill gives you. We are dealing with aspects of production and of sensorial sensation at the same time. We open different layers of fun and of how it's been experienced. We also work with magic tricks, with the aspect of manipulation...

CC: Oh, that's great!

LM: In the end, I think the piece opens windows and offers a possibility for the body to expose itself.

EB: *What did you find out about the body and about fun?*

LM: The moment to give in, and to actually just scream, to surrender and enjoy it, was so great... after one ride I bought a picture of myself on the ride, my face is captured in a huge scream between horror and enjoyment. To transgress these borders, and to let the sensation happen.

EB: *How did you work, Cristina?*

CC: Well, "A Line_up" started off with the formation of the choir. And then it is exactly what you were speaking about, Lea, that I strongly disagree with the assumption that contemporary dance is not entertaining. But for me entertainment is perhaps something else. Because entertainment as it is understood nowadays is visible in the moment and it's consumable in the moment. But if you look at the word 'enter' and 'tain', you actually don't enter anything and you don't retain anything.



"FUN!" by Lea Moro © Nelly Rodriguez



I would speak more in terms of pleasure, desire, fear, interest, intellectual turmoil... are you, so to speak, physically, intellectually engaged. To me, that is entertainment. And I think contemporary dance does that. For me, it has the edges to do that. The very moment of feeling something, but you cannot grasp it, for me is the best entertainment ever. But you know, you cannot consume it. It is not for me to have.

Using fictional biography to sell yourself is what Facebook is about now.

EB: Where did the musical "A Chorus Line" come in?

CC: I looked at the most blatant example of where dance loses this patina of the incomprehensible and enters the economy of success. Making money is in the musical, where they speak, dance and sing. It is a fixed format, it is actually quite stereotypical. But there is one musical that broke this format, "A Chorus Line", from 1975. It was interesting to me because it was a self-employment project by dancers who were out of work. They got together to put on a show to self-employ themselves and because they had this urge to dance. But instead of just work-

ing on the steps and the composition of dance on top of a score and a script that is ready when rehearsal starts, they began by sitting around a table and telling one another their life stories. Their life stories then became the narrative of this piece. They dance three times, the rest of the time they talk about themselves, about being gay, about being a single mother... and it became a major success! Fictionalised autobiography became the show, which then, two years later, Pina Bausch began to do with her Tanztheater Wuppertal. Using fictional biography to sell yourself is what Facebook is about now.

EB: Are you now showing a musical?

CC: It was interesting: When I said I wanted to do a musical, I immediately sold 17 shows on big stages. But my intention was to put something on the stage that has a different affect than the tragic life-stories which they tell in the original. I wanted to twist it, to tell other stories. And I wanted not to speak of it, but to dance it and be it, for real. And that would eventually move the audience on a level of affect and they would be tricked into an experience of a third kind, you know. But it's been a very difficult project, because the analysis of the original was very, very interesting, and we wrote our own fictional biographies. But in the end, you have this beau-

tiful dance, which nobody understands. So I tried to dress it up, I sugarcoated it with pop songs and visual effects. But in some places, the only part the audience loves is this sugarcoated one.

LM: I like this, playing with expectations. I enjoy giving the audience something that I know they want, but then I just proceed from that to something else, what they might not want. I think that's also a nice thing.

EB: You are seducing the audience to go somewhere where they didn't want to go in the first place, but then you show them a way to enter it?

LM: Yes. But I don't have such a struggle like Cristina to give the audience something that is really entertaining. I still can find my way to do it, or to disturb it, to irritate the audience, like: is she serious about that or not?

CC: All of the issues that we are talking about are cornerstones for the time that we are living in, and they are hard to carry on stage. Because of this habit and non-practice of taking entertainment seriously. To take it seriously, you know. When did this happen, that entertainment became something brainwashed, where you don't have to engage, where they don't have to take a position? 📌

Lea Moro
FUN!
11.8., 21:00, 12.8., 18:00, 13.8., 17:00 | HAU2
Deutschlandpremiere | 60 min

ccap
A Line_up
25.+26.8., 21:00 | RADIALSYSTEM V
Deutschlandpremiere | 105 min

