

That Fungi Feel

Maija Hirvanen on being enmeshed in the more-than-human

Interview: Tang Fu Kuen

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After presenting “Art and Love” in 2018, Maija Hirvanen returns to Tanz im August with her new work, “Mesh”. Curator Tang Fu Kuen asks her about the work’s foundation in entanglements with other species and the challenges of assimilating many life forms into choreography.

Tang Fu Kuen: In the last two years you have adopted a ‘more-than-human’ mode of working and worldview for “Mesh”. How did this come about?

Maija Hirvanen: I started working with the dancers on principles of non-linearity, interconnectivity, co-dependence and post-individual uniqueness. I developed a range of practices for this to which the dancers responded in several ways. We worked with corporeal listening, initiating and transmitting rhythms through the whole body, signaling across time and place. Amidst the cancellations and postponement of “Mesh” due to Covid, we have been keeping with the process for instance by giving space to light-heartedness and misunderstandings. An example: there was a moment at the beginning of the rehearsals when one of the dancers, Marlon Moilanen, misheard the term ‘more-than-human’ and thought I said “Morten Human” – as a name – and from there, a performance character called Morten Human emerged to haunt the process a little.

FK: With “Mesh” you deepen your enquiry into how human bodies commune to produce difference and identity, and move towards open sensibility. Could you elaborate on the politics and paradigm of the ‘old anatomy’ and ‘fungi feel’ you are engaged in?

MH: The choreography is based on movements and sounds that can be simultaneously human and of other species and life forms. The dancers are entangling, blooming, electrifying, decaying, howling, meshing. And they are

breathing, like the audience members or the building. Breathing connects us to the breathing of others, to the air, to the wind. Out of this a certain ‘old anatomy’, as I call it, emerges. If you observe the bones in the wing of a bird, they resemble the bones of our hands. Human anatomy is interlinked and enmeshed with the anatomy of fish, fungi, mammalian forms. From this perspective individuality as we often understand it disappears. In “Mesh” the dancers perform through an ‘old anatomy’ that understands an individual human body as part of a long continuation of life, that dances times, places and energies that connect to times beyond our lifetime and cycles that run through us as minerals, waters and breaths.

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FK: What incited your interest in fungi?

MH: I learned sustainable forestry from my father, it’s a family tradition. I created my first performances in the forest. Over the past decade I have spent a great deal of time deep in the woods, particularly during autumn. I look for mushrooms, I wander, I get lost, I empty out, I get surprised. I gently peek under the mosses, say hello to the mycelium. I have learnt from the way fungi think and are; and in dancing with them, I have become more fungi-like. The dancers and I have connected with the way of being and thinking of fungi in the studio too. Instead of playing mushroom networks, the dancers have found something in the way of being of the fungi out of themselves, as a group. A kind of a fungi-human-hybrid way of being. To learn from and tune in with a ‘fungi feel’ for me is to work with perception, orientation, attention, expression and senses in a way where the totality of an individual body disappears and the collective corporeality, with all affects involved, appears. ‘Fungi feel’ relates to expanding imagination, to playfulness and to not-knowing.

FK: What challenges have you faced in dealing with the ‘representation’ of non-human bodies?

MH: When one walks away from one representation, another representation comes into place. And there are always multiple representations and readings going on at the same time, consciously and unconsciously. So for “Mesh” it’s been a question of concentrating on the concreteness of the physical performing body, the contact between dancers, the intentions toward audience perception and working with multiple possibilities of representation at the same time. The main focus, for instance, is not the representations that the sound of breathing creates, but breathing itself. Similarly, some practices of “Mesh” work with and study the way mycelium moves, thinks and relates, and traces these principles in our human body, corporeal wisdom and group behavior. But at the same time the dancers are still Marlon Moilanen, Marika Peura, Suvi Tuominen and Pie Kär, with all their histories, feelings and thoughts. They are also unique creatures, a collective of artists with different identities – and they also perform animal, fungal and bacterial bodies, bodies of knowledge and time, in and through themselves. 🍄

**Maija Hirvanen
Mesh**

12.8., 19:00 | 13.8., 21:00 | 14.8., 19:00 | HAUZ
Weltpremiere