



Tracing beautiful flaws

Ayelen Parolin and her rejection of a linear logic

Text: Olivier Hespel

Ayelen Parolin talks about her path from a dancer to a choreographer, creating organized chaos on stage and remembering her native Argentina.

On an immaculate white stage are nine colourful spots. Nine creatures whose whimsical appearance relies as much on the fabric covering them as on the gestures that break free from them, which are neither hesitant nor determined, neither fluid nor staccato. Nine figures, each of whom seems to follow their own path and their own individual dance, although none of these dances is actually 'one dance,' but rather a patchwork of diverse grammars... A surprising tumult emanates from this joyful bustle of bodies, both disparate and firmly connected to each other.

How does one make a group? How does one exist in the plural without erasing the singular? How are black and white to be mixed without arriving at grey? These are some of the questions that served as a point of departure for the creation of "WEG", whose central challenge was "the composition of chaos out of nine individualities," says Ayelen Parolin, "to draw a 'landscape': a complex harmony/disharmony. [...] Before I began working on the piece, I met with physicist Pierre C. Dauby from the University of Liège, who guided and accompanied me toward an understanding of chaos theory. I was fascinated by the invisible links that exist in nature, how everything is interconnected... I also knew that I wanted to trace these paths, these individual paths, which intersect and coincide almost imperceptibly; to create an unstable balance, a tension between individual singularity and common abstraction."

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The desire to play with unstable equilibria, to juggle opposites, contradictions, is one of the great recurrences in Parolin's writing. Not as a result of her taste for contradiction, but for what it reveals us to be: always more complex than we would like to believe. "What I find beautiful and what attracts me to people are all their flaws, their imperfections, their illogicalities, their incongruities. This is the material I want to work with, and what my starting point has always been: not smoothing things out; rather, on the contrary, emphasising the roughness, the bumps, the holes..." Accepting complexity. Rejecting cleavages, making them collide. There is an eminently queer state of mind in this approach, even if she doesn't proclaim it and even if, formally, aesthetically, this qualifier is not the one we would impulsively bestow upon her at first glance.

Escaping formats, formatting, is another question that has occupied her for a long time. Here again, the attempt is not the fruits of a penchant for contradiction, nor of a futile search to

be different from an undefined mass, but rather, of a resolve to be oneself, fully, in acceptance of all of one's paradoxes, strengths, and weaknesses. In short, it is a reaction to the imperatives of efficiency and performance defended by ultra-liberal logic, advocacy for the complexity of the self in order to make the plurality of a 'we' more possible, a more or less fluid set of resolutely polymorphic 'Is.'

This rejection of a linear logic, ironed out, as well as this affirmation of the multiplicity of all identities, are both already found at the heart of the writing of her first solo piece, "25.06.76" (her date of birth): a rough collage between fragments of her past dance experiences, an autobiographical narrative delivered into the microphone, and a finale that invokes a 'monster' and its primal cry... "It was La Ribot (who taught at the exercise training programme in Montpellier) who advised me to do a solo piece. At the time [2003], it had been three years since I had left Argentina for Europe. I had gone through a whole series of workshops, internships, projects without money, and then I'd completed the exercise training programme, but I hadn't really managed to integrate myself into the dance world and, although I would reach the final stages of selection in auditions, I was never accepted. It drove me mad. With all these introspective questions in mind, I immersed myself in this solo piece without trying to do anything pretty or to show how well I can dance, but rather, to say, 'Look, I'm doing all this, I am all this,' even if it meant showing sides of myself that I didn't like at all..." The solo piece was seen and noticed. Following Brussels, she performed in Bergen, Paris, Madrid, Rome... But still Parolin did not see herself as a choreographer. But as La Ribot



Ayelen Parolin © Floris Van Cauwelaert

had predicted, her solo piece released something in her. A series of engagements followed: Mathilde Monnier, Mossoux-Bonté, Jean-François Peyret, Alexandra Bachzetsis, Anne Lopez, Riina Saastamoinen...

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For it is dancing that lets Parolin breathe. A pleasure she discovered as a child, when she would dance for hours in front of the mirror in her room. So much so that her mother enrolled her in various classes: classical, jazz, and Spanish dance. That said, at the age of 6, Parolin is far from wanting to play ballerina. Rather, she dreams of Raffaella Carrà... "My first memories in the dance studio are not very pleasant: I went from facing the mirror in my room, where I was completely free to do what I wanted, to a space where it was all about discipline, instructions to follow, repeating steps to perfection..." And the ordeal continued, until her eleventh year of life, when there occurred "a turning point: my teacher got pregnant. Her replacement was harsh with me. 'You're skinny for nothing!' she kept shouting at me. Instead of being crushed by her attitude, it pushed me to make more of an effort, to prove to myself that I could do it. And I rediscovered a form of pleasure: I felt that vibration, that motor that whirs into motion when you dance. It was a huge boost for me. Prior to that, I would reject everything that was linked to learning, to the notion of perfection; it was too abstract for me, I didn't see the point."

During this same period, the young girl decided that she would go by Parolin (pronounced [ɑʃɛlɛn]), her middle name. Exit Vanina: "When I went back to secondary school, I wanted to start a new life. In the Mapuche language [one of Argentina's indigenous peoples], ayelen means joy, lightness, to be carefree..." A means of striving towards a different self-image. It's also a means of asserting the Amerindian blood that flows through her: "My maternal grandmother was indigenous, but my mother spoke about it very little. The rest of my family came from Italy (Venetia, Calabria) and recounted many more memories. This lack of 'memory' on my mother's side always made me curious. I even had the fantasy of going to live with an indigenous people to learn a dance, a ritual, to experience another way of life, outside of 'society'..." Nature and culture, another dichotomy to which she regularly makes reference. It also holds resonance with her own experience. But not only that: "The conflict I have between accessing something more natural and having to juggle learning codes and values (which I am not sure correspond to me/us) is also linked, I think, to the very history of Argentina, a country of colonists who



"WEG" © Pierre-Philippe Holmann

sought to exterminate indigenous peoples, to "cleanse" the country..."

Today – after almost twenty years in dance and now the choreographer of more than a dozen pieces – when asked why she should continue, Ayelen Parolin answers without much hesitation: "For empathy. To be able to nearly step out of yourself and create a channel of communication that is not transmitted through words, through which you make others feel sensations that they are not experiencing themselves. [...] For pleasure, too. I think that over the years (with pieces such as 'David', 'Heretics' and 'Autóctonos II'), the choreographer who has taken shape has become increasingly distant from the performer I have always been – 'wild, animal, spontaneous,' to use terms that have often been used to describe me... I demanded from the performers things that attracted me, but which I was incapable of doing myself: rigour, precision, following a thread, timing... With 'WEG', I consciously sought to (re)concile these two parts of myself: to create a piece that corresponds more to me and that I would enjoy performing in the here and now while respecting the requirements of the structure of writing, in space and in time." 🗨️

Translated from French by Emily Pollak.

Ayelen Parolin | RUDA asbl | Meet the Artist
After "WEG". Memories of a creation | Film

21.8., 21:00 | 10min | Online
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