

# Window on the Process of Creating *Echo Flux*: Stories, Strategies, and Feelings of Five Performers of Carte Blanche

## INTRODUCTION

*“When you’re a dancer, you get an idea of what the work or the outcome of a project might be. At times, you might get a sense that it’s moving away, and you feel disappointed, or that something’s not quite right. Starting a process is always enjoyable, since you don’t know what it’s going to turn into. I’m always filled with excitement when faced with this unknown, this opening up of possibilities. Then comes the moment when I really feel what the piece is. I’m often relieved to reach this stage, where I understand what we are doing and my place in it.”*

--Caroline Eckly

Each new piece brings a different set of issues for Carte Blanche’s performers, who produce at least three works a year. As the dancer Caroline Eckly tells us above, a creation is an intersecting point of projections, expectations, doubts, learning, and revelations through contact with different choreographers. After numerous group pieces, the *Echo Flux* 2019 spring program divided Carte Blanche, the Norwegian national contemporary dance company, into two entities. The new artistic director Annabelle Bonn ry<sup>1</sup> brought together two pairs of choreographers and composers with the intention of having them start the choreographic and musical creative processes concurrently. With the encounter between these two artistic mediums as the initial concept, the guest artists used their common interests to construct the subject of their respective work. For *the departed Heart*, a piece for five dancers, choreographer Alban Richard<sup>2</sup> and composer Sebastian Rivas<sup>3</sup> found common ground in the theme of melancholy and decay. For *Primal*, a piece for eight dancers, choreographer Ayelen Parolin<sup>4</sup> and composer Ezra<sup>5</sup> sought to reveal an irrational and primitive dimension of human nature. Having observed the entire process during the six weeks of creation, here I am offering a point of access into the way in which this dual program was produced. My intention is to highlight the often little-known point of view of the performers, and so I conducted interviews with Caroline Eckly, Olha Stetsyuk, Guro Rimesl tten, Sebastian Biong, and Dawid Lorenc. The resulting document below is an invitation to reflect on what constitutes the hidden side of a work, its process of development, by giving voice to those who take part in its creation. What are the practices, methods, and references that underlie *the departed Heart* and *Primal*? What skills and strategies do the performers draw upon in the course of the creative process?

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<sup>1</sup> Annabelle Bonn ry (France) is a dancer, teacher, and choreographer. She co-directed the Lanabel dance company with Fran ois Deneulin. At Carte Blanche she was previously Rehearsal Director under the direction of Bruno Heynderickx, and in August 2018 was appointed Artistic Director of the company.

<sup>2</sup> Alban Richard (France) is a dancer, teacher, and choreographer. Since 2015 he has directed the Centre Chor graphique National de Caen.

<sup>3</sup> Sebastian Rivas (Argentina) is a composer and sound artist. Since September 2018 he has directed the Centre National de Cr ation Musical de Lyon (GRAME).

<sup>4</sup> Ayelen Parolin (Argentina) is a dancer, teacher, and choreographer. Based in Brussels, she develops choreographic works in various countries throughout the world.

<sup>5</sup> Ezra (France) is a beatboxer, performer, and teacher. He is director of the Organic Orchestra and brings artists together for works that are contemporary, popular, transdisciplinary, and collaborative.

*THE DEPARTED HEART:*  
FROM THE MUTUAL CONSTRAINT TO THE SINGULAR SUBJECT

***Nurturing the body memory of one with the imprint of the other:  
the laboratory of movement***

The process of creating *the departed Heart* began in the form of a laboratory of movement. Choreographer Alban Richard proposed experimenting with a set of physical tasks. In this case he has the role of a custodian of a way of moving which he transmits via instructions and sometimes also demonstration. This is not a matter of showing a form or creating a sequence of movements according to a method, but rather of approaching the movement by the performer's placing importance on a particular element: a part of the body, their breathing, the sensation of weight, the way of looking at things ... The work environment is described as "relaxing" by performer Caroline Eckly, who remarks on the clarity of the instructions: "*It has nothing to do with having to invent a task for yourself or even imagining what image the choreographer wants to produce. It is a question of developing concentration for precisely carrying out a very well-defined task. It had been a long time since we had worked with the company in this way.*" The group was divided regularly into two, which allowed the performers to observe each other. Caroline remarks, "*It was fascinating to see how two different bodies practicing a similar task could suddenly unify the space. It was enough to have two different persons, each with their own freedom of movement, following the same instruction.*" The time spent creating the piece was structured by alternating practice with discussion. Thus the performers were not only called upon to perform an action but also invited to develop their own sense of observation and formulations concerning what they see and feel. The precision underlying the task determines the way of looking and therefore how the subject is dealt with in the discussion that follows the practice. The verbal exchanges were regular and brief. This methodology makes it possible to analyze the movement and to gather the working groups according to pre-established constraints. In this way, the performers are actors but also contribute to research on the sense and perception of the gesture. Performer Olha Stetsyuk points out Alban Richard's pedagogical skills in conveying his research and developing personalized feedback for the performers: "*From the first day of rehearsal right up to the premiere, all these tasks have been useful and remain essential for the current piece. The fact that the group was small was good for both us and Alban as well. Alban loves working on details, analyzing your body, and scrutinizing your habits and preferences. Gradually, he polishes you; he tries to instill in you the best way to carry out the tasks that he's asking you to do. It's not a straightforward job. He knows where he is going and what aspect he wants to bring out, but with your physical and artistic understanding, you find your own way to arrive at this result. He is really there to guide you in a very sensitive and respectful way.*"

Olha then returns to the topic of manipulations with several dancers: "*For example, my colleague gives me a physical stimulus and I am the one who has to follow it. I need to keep this external manipulation in mind, and feel that it is my body that is doing the guiding and not my brain. These things may seem invisible but they are actually quite well-defined in order to work with that quality of movement.*" To give a more complete picture of the dancer's verbal account, here are a few examples of the choreographer's practices. Two people move together with their partner's hands on their shoulder blades. Or, a person walks while their partner is pressing their hands on them, in order to weigh the body down or lift it up in the pelvis, ribcage, or head. They also proceeded to similar manipulations in groups of

three dancers plus an object. For example, two partners would hold a blanket in order to support the pelvis of a third person, who moves with this support. After each move, the dancer is led to explore on their own. They no longer have the physical support of the other in order to feel a part of their body, but they themselves must become aware of it and focus their attention on it. They are engaged in a work of reconstruction and rearrangement of sensations. This set of exercises makes it possible to learn how to follow where the movement (impulse) is from, and not to act through a bodily projection into space. Far from being obvious, this work is supported by the feedback of the choreographer, who frequently reminds them: “*Do not overplay. This does in fact happen. Deal with the real impulses.*” In the final version of the piece, there is no apparent manipulation but this “impression work” is constantly being activated in the memory of the performers. It is as though the bodies are inhabited by the spirits of those who touched them.

Some tasks call forth another form of memory. This is the case with the one called “Martin Arnold”, which refers to the Austrian director who creates cinematic works by reusing old strips of movie film (found footage). Arnold disassembles the narrative and breaks up the original continuity of the films. The resulting new films highlight the sounds while leaving the actors’ movements in suspense. In this way the actions are decomposed, giving the impression of glitches that are resolved only to interrupt again, creating a new rhythm. This principle of decomposition serves as a source of inspiration for choreographer Alban Richard. The purpose of the “Martin Arnold” task is not to focus on a part of the body, which is a point in space, but rather to memorize the trajectory and sequence of actions. It does not involve merely inducing movements back and forth that would produce a robotic gesture, but to add to these glitches a continuity of gesture. Caroline relates her experience on this subject: “*The Martin Arnold task is difficult. My short-term memory isn’t good – I’m unable to remember what I just did the moment before. But I find the state that this task causes to be interesting: you have to concentrate and memorize everything you do at every moment in order to try to recreate it. There are tasks that are more comfortable, like slow motion, for example. I like doing that one because I have time for myself and it requires a certain internal concentration.*” The difficulty or the simplicity of a task varies according to the individual performers, who can find either rest or challenges to their attention.

### ***Approaching melancholy from a sensory point of view: increased respiration and physicality***

The beginning of the process was devoted to carrying out tasks performed by all the dancers; later, moments of personal research were added that came from cinematographic or pictorial references. Alban chose works for each particular performer. Some film clips were viewed by the entire group, but without the audio, in order to observe body, posture, and movement in a different way. Olha worked with a music video by Massive Attack that was inspired by a scene with actress Isabelle Adjani in the subway, taken from the film *Possession* (1981) by director Andrzej Zulawski. She describes how this reference was integrated: “*Rather than relying on a perception at an emotional level or on acting skills, I had to recreate a character with the physical tools I had. Alban was absolutely obsessed with rhythm. With my video, for example, we chose specific durations like: ‘three seconds with this look / five seconds to build up a state / fifteen seconds to go from one space to the other’. This was not a matter of going faster or slower, but playing with the various aspects of my physicality. The challenge is to allow myself to be guided by the physical stimuli and to follow the motor points of the head or the ribcage, for example. The ‘truthful’ rhythm comes from a state where you let things*

*appear, and you don't add anything more.*" The method described is that of a physical reading of acting. The rhythm and the precise duration of each element are tools to build the solo. Their composition is worked out by going back and forth between the performer's research and the choreographer's feedback. In general, the clips chosen depict extreme physical states: accelerated breathing, stumbling, focusing of the gaze on an object, mouth agape, hands held up to the throat, hands supporting a heavy head under the chin, and so on. Alban Richard worked on melancholy by means of these different postures but also through deep work on breathing in collaboration with the composer.

Composer Sebastian Rivas developed a musical score based on the sound of the dancers' breathing, which is then transformed into a set of strings of the viola da gamba, an instrument whose timbre is close to the human voice. The raw sound of the breath is transformed through programmed and activated effects in real time. At the end of the piece, one of the performers, Adrian Bartczak, reads a text in English. This speaking voice functions as an additional melody. The piece on the viola da gamba is drawn out and slowed down, giving the sound environment a sense of the eternal. In the end, the musical composition makes it possible to hear a variety of timbres of breaths, echoes, spoken voices, and bowed strings. However, although the aesthetic effects may sink the audience into a hypnotic state, while this is going on, the performers themselves have at times been forced to deal with difficulties or questions that arise. Dancer Caroline explains the reason behind this attention to breathing and places it in perspective in the history of dance practices: *"In the 2000s, I was taught to accompany my movement with breathing; then that approach became outdated. With this piece, it sometimes seems weird to me to amplify my breathing – it can even make me feel like laughing! There are tasks where this works better: for example, when working with the ribcage, it's easy to think about respiration. At other times it's more artificial. This is the case at one point in this piece where you have to remain very quiet in a particular position while producing a lot of noise with the mouth. I can't always manage this – it's not organic. There is also a retroactive awareness to develop: if you hear that you are producing breath, you can listen to it and it influences something in your movement."* However, at the center of this coordination, reaching the stage of being able to play with the interaction between movement and sound is difficult, and not to be taken for granted. Olha speaks of the challenge in interpretation that this conception of music in real time presents her: *"It was as exciting as it was strange! The process seemed too short, as though it should have taken longer. The piece was created choreographically and the music was put in final form afterwards. It was planned that way, but being able to understand the effects and play around with them was difficult. The technical problems with sound took on more and more importance in the rehearsals at the end of the process."* In fact, in this arrangement, where the choreographer and composer were working at the same time, the dancers were mainly following the instructions of choreographer Alban Richard. For the musical composition, Sebastian Rivas and his assistant Max Bruckert tested the audio effects during rehearsals and run-throughs. Since the major factor in putting together the soundtrack was the issue of properly recording the dancers' respiration in real time, the dancers were indispensable for achieving the programmed effects. This creative element implied that the artistic teams needed to accept the amount of time it took for programming and also for resolving technical problems. The completion of the creative process made adjustments necessary in order for the piece to be finished on time. Thus, technology became an additional partner in the overall strategy.

### ***Overlapping strata of constraints: the timer and elevated platforms***

In the last part of the process, Alban Richard organized materials in time and space. The drama of *the departed Heart* emerged from a structure that was refined over the course of several run-throughs. The Sebastian Rivas's compositional effects were also gradually put into final form. The teams then worked with a timer, with screens installed on both sides of the stage to indicate the time. The timer functioned virtually as a partner for the performers, each of whom was required to work within the confines of an individualized score that specified the durations of each task. Olha describes her experience with this tool: "*At first I was irritated by the timer – it was a bit unusual. It was like having another person in control over the action. After a while, I realized that the timer was in charge of time but there was also some room to maneuver, so I gained more confidence. At that moment, you create a sense of time in yourself that you weren't aware of at the beginning. It's the same with the platforms: you have this space that's unusual, unknown, and you can have problems with proximity and difficulty calculating distances. Eventually, if you practice in this specific space, you become capable of moving in it – your body knows the space.*" In Olha's account, the platforms are as much of a constraint for practicing as the timer is. As the measurable time intervals elapsed, over the course of rehearsals she developed a feeling for experiential time. The platforms of *the departed Heart* at the center of the stage were of different heights. The bodies were exposed as if they were on risers. The dancers had to make adjustments to reduce their performance space and develop precision in their movements. The body states worked with at the beginning of the process had to then be utilized in performance with the awareness of a new spatiality and temporality governed by the overall structure of the piece.

I spoke with Caroline at the end of the creative process, after the overall drama of *the departed Heart* emerged: "*Alban always spoke of precise timing for each gesture but I didn't anticipate how much of a limitation it would also pose in the path taken across the stage, on the different levels, and in our relationship to each other. I would like to have been even more absorbed by some form of concentration and having to make decisions in the moment, how to position myself in the space, for example. I find it difficult, from one run-through to another, to stay in the same presence I had at the beginning. We're now reaching the point where we have to integrate the lighting, the costumes... which is common to all processes. I ask myself how this research regarding movement can be passed along, considering all of the other elements that are part of this piece.*" In this passage, Caroline raises a frequent question for the performers: namely, once the other elements – the scenographic, musical, and lighting – come into play, what remains from the finer points of the research on movement? If we look beyond the performer's point of view, we can read more into it than just a change in priority for the choreographer, a move from one stage to another in the process of creation. We will then differentiate between the laboratory period occurring at the beginning and the production of the final theatrical work. In this last stage of production, the piece is then sculpted with precision under the watchful eye of the choreographer and his assistant Daphne Mauger. Shortly after discussing these questions in conversation with Caroline, the choreographer restated the importance of this research on movement for the end of the creative process. Olha quotes him as saying: "*I am interested in you because you are five different dancers. I'm not interested in the task, but how you're going to deal with it, how you're going to color it with your own approach. If I see none of the process in you nor any of your curiosity, it will probably be difficult to keep my attention as an audience.*" In short, Olha goes on to discuss how each rehearsal, run-through, and performance is an opportunity to invest these different tasks in discovery: "*You can feel too completely overcome by all the elements that you're*

*paying attention to. But when you're able to explore them, it can become a really interesting journey for you. You're not on autopilot; instead, in every run-through you have the power to surprise yourself. I'm really pleased with the end result of this piece, and particularly with the process, which is more important to me than the result. When we perform, I continue to consider the piece as a work in progress. In fact, seen from another angle, the process is continuing."*

## **PRIMAL: FROM HIGH INDIVIDUAL INTENSITY TO CHORAL BREATHING**

***Experience with a shaman  
drawing upon the performers' vocabulary:  
materials from multiple sources***

At the beginning stage of creative development, choreographer Ayelen Parolin and composer Ezra invited the Sámi shaman Eirik Myrhaug to give a two-day workshop. All of the *Primal* dancers were present, along with other members of the company, the lighting and sound designers, and several members of the administration. For Ayelen Parolin, who has regularly invited shamans into her creative process, the purpose of this experiment was rather to give the group the opportunity to meet in a new context. However, as Sebastian Biong, a new dancer in the company, notes, this meeting provided a specific point of reference for the entire group as a whole: *"I was glad to have had this 'terrifying' experience. It was a good way to get closer to my new colleagues. I felt that this workshop, at the beginning of the process, had provided a very specific reference with which to relate to each other, something with which we could bond with each other throughout the rehearsals."* During the workshop, the shaman Eirik Myrhaug outlined a vision of the world and a set of references, symbols from many traditions. He passed along several practices: taking turns using a "talking stick", astral travel and visualizing animal spirit guides, breathwork with hyperventilation, and finally, a ceremony dedicated to the creation of *Primal*. For many of these practices, he was accompanied by drumming. Entirely guided by the shaman, the artistic team did not comment on the use or the way to examine this material for purposes of creation. In the interviews, the performers talked more about the influence that this experience had on an overall atmosphere for the piece, rather than as a matter of mutual inquiry. They noted, however, that the workshop with the shaman was a source of inspiration for the second part of the piece. In it, the dancers stand facing the audience and they all increase their breathing en masse for a considerable length of time. During the workshop, the experiment with hyperventilation was expanded by having people pair off with each other, with one person beginning to breathe more audibly and the other accompanying it with either an active or passive presence. The context of the workshop established a common reference point, a support to feel the sensations better, making it possible to better interpret the scene.

Musically, the workshop with the shaman served as a direct compositional inspiration for the beatboxer and composer Ezra. The latter chose to record the drum and use it in the first part of the piece – but not the sound of a drum being played naturally. Instead, the recording is looped and transformed by electronic effects that vary the audio frequency from top to bottom. This gives the dancers a relatively fast beat for the beginning of the piece, lending a

feeling of urgency. Ezra's creative process then proceeded by trial and error while working alongside the choreographer. Meanwhile, the beatboxer began by offering the dancers a workshop at the beginning of his residency. He invited the dancers to explore the different ways of producing sound with their mouths: breaths, whistles, tongue clicks, vibrations, and so on. After a guided exploration, Ezra suggested the image of a jungle as the source of a wide variety of sounds in a spontaneous composition. Later, he chose to record this, using a vocal sample of each performer. Thus, for his musical creation the composer had the opportunity to re-arrange the duration of the sounds and to devise a new form of rhythmicity. After trying this out, in the end Ezra did not use any beatboxing. Instead, the musical accompaniment was made up of various sources ranging from the sounds of the drum to those generated by the performers, as well as recordings taken from nature. Even though the periods of time that Ezra spent recording the dancers were short, his very presence seemed to me to influence the auditory experimentation that took place during creative time with the choreographer, as we will have the opportunity to discuss further below.

The start of the choreographic work is similar, since it also begins with the performers. After the workshop with the shaman, when Ayelen Parolin took over the group she invited each dancer to perform a solo. The dancer Dawid Lorenc reports, *"She asked us for something that came from inside us: something that we wanted to do or to dance, for the piece ... and to do it full-on, 100%."* She also gave us the opportunity to use elements of the workshop with the shaman. A new rite of passage, it was to consist of whatever arose spontaneously. Each performer responded in their own way as they faced their colleagues, who were their audience. After this period of improvisation, a structuring phase followed. Ayelen asked each performer to create their own sequence of 10 to 15 movements. Work on this simple exercise in creativity was the subject of the first weeks of the creative process. Dawid explains as follows: *"The strategy given by Ayelen was to ask us to create a sequence with all kinds of movement: different styles, states, or simple ideas around which to improvise. It was clear that the point of departure could be anything, as long as we knew what it was, that we could more or less reproduce it and put it into some kind of order. I realized that she wanted something that was of value to us, not just a series of random moves, although that too could happen. She asked us to find a song from our childhood that could be kitsch or a cliché. She had this idea: no matter what type of dance it is, if it's performed with genuine commitment its value can be the same."* With this instruction, the performers were asked to create choreographic material within their technical ability. They were required to invent various tasks for themselves, to develop imaginary gestures and to be able to reproduce them from one time to the next. Sebastian Biong, for example, drew on previous pieces from his career as a dancer. It is interesting to note that the nature of the gesture does not take its value from his dance style but rather from the way it is embodied. In other words, to cite the examples described by Dawid, a scream provoked by a dinosaur from Jurassic Park is of equal value as a Polish folk dance or someone dancing to rock music in a nightclub. Thus, each performer is responsible for and custodian of their own material. Suggesting that the dancers remember a song from their childhood produced a range of musicalities. In the final piece, some performers use their voices to variously produce onomatopoeia, singing, shouting, chanting, and breathing and also strike the floor in various ways. In addition to Ezra's musical composition, the onstage performers and the microphones that create sound spatialization all contribute to the total sonic environment.

The personal sequences were employed in various ways in the first part of the piece. Sebastian talks about the evolution of the work on this choreographic material: *"She wanted a dance sequence with movements that changed rapidly. The first time I performed my*

*sequence, I was experiencing several different states inside me. Then she wanted one state, or in any case one single intensity, and she incorporated many rhythms inside it. Right now I really have the feeling of there being one single line through the entire piece. It evolves and takes on new forms, but it comes from one starting point. I try to have this mental state of being there, knowing that changes can occur even before they do occur.”* The notions of ritual and cycle appear in the description of the repetition of this personal sequence. At the same time, Sebastian considers this guiding line through the choreographic material and identifies one single source, a starting point with evolutions. However, he remarks on how difficult it is to feel his personal variations when the choreographer asks for a high intensity of execution. This is an impression shared by his fellow dancer Guro: *“Ayelen is asking for a constant high intensity as a line for my role in the piece. I had to adjust to this, and let go of my own dynamic variations in the work. It’s challenging for me to keep to only one way of performing my sequence. I feel more free in the last part – it’s rather new, and less written. I still have the freedom to play. There is probably still room to search for freedom in the first part as well, but it has become fixed, with the addition of more and more cues, of unisons, so it seems more challenging. At this stage, at the end of the process, we finally realize that it is still possible to play around.”* Thus we understand that the choreographic material proposed by the performers at the beginning of the process was transformed under the supervision of the choreographer, who built up a structure with many cues.

### ***Negotiating the spatial structure and rhythm of the piece: strategies for fostering the artistic intention***

Choreographer Ayelen Parolin structured the choreographic material within the space of the stage set. At the beginning of *Primal*, the dancers perform the resulting choreographic sequence several times: first moving in a spiral, then more freely, and then afterwards with numerous cues and connections to the movements of the other dancers. Because of these cues given while the dancers are in motion, this approach to structure has required a high level of responsiveness on their part. The dancer Guro talks about these difficulties following the choreographer’s feedback: *“The timings given by the choreographer are quite set and rigid. At the same time the work is also asking for a letting go, and for the performers to go deep into a state and a way of being. I think Ayelen loves the urgency and complexity, but because of the contradictions in the methods, it is not always that easy for me to achieve what she is looking for.”* Guro detects paradoxes in Ayelen’s method, and wishes that the performers would have had more dialogue about ways to build up the desired urgency. To her, the feedback regarding timings did not seem sufficient to think about what, in the choreographer’s view, makes it work. Rebekka Bomann-Larsen meticulously noted the timings of the parts at each run-through. Although this was not necessarily relayed to the performers directly, Ezra made use of this information in order to establish the durations of his composition. At this point, when durations in the musical composition need to be established, the dancers are faced with the issue of finding an organic quality to their movements, of exploring the sequence more deeply instead of falling into mere routine. Consequently, time management becomes a very concrete dialogue tool for collaboration between choreographer and composer.

Two weeks after work began, Marc Iglesias joined the artistic team as assistant choreographer. Marc – first a dancer and then Ayelen Parolin’s assistant for previous choreographies – quickly grasped the current work of *Primal*. He brought in a fresh look and discussions with the choreographer about new proposals. Although the piece was already well

structured at that point, Marc took over for a few days of rehearsals. At the time of our interview, Sebastian the dancer wonders about this working pair: *“I’m interested to hear Ayelen’s reaction when she returns. They are on the same page, they understand each other, but sometimes there’s some misapprehension. I wonder if his instructions will line up with what Ayelen wants.”* From this comment, we can understand how the process is in fact under the influence of a major way of thinking, that of the choreographer. Her role is to lead the entire team into her artistic world. Following the run-throughs, I observed that Ayelen, in her style of giving feedback, points out what she likes and what works well, but she does not always say why. The performers therefore need to infer the type of choreographic research that they are experiencing as the work is progressing. This observation involves different attitudes, depending on the performer. Some of them assimilate the research and try to find their own “guiding line”, as Sebastian has explained above. For others, like Guro, a degree of incomprehension persists and makes physical involvement difficult: *“We did not start the process with deep research. Very early on, we began setting up a structure. It was always nurtured by the external point of view. For me, a common search for the content was somehow lacking. But this was a strategic choice on the part of the choreographer. Ayelen explained that she would like to start with the form and let the form be nurtured by the content as the process went further. It was more the case that everyone had to look for it on their own without mutual discussion in advance. This was my biggest challenge: finding a common understanding that would have gone beyond appreciating the movement in the particular moment. I would have appreciated more sharing and dialogue around the core and content of the project, which I am still searching for and discovering by doing. It was a challenge to find the motivation to do something very physical without having an idea of where it came from or what it would generate.”* The choreographer’s research develops implicitly, proceeding by a series of intuitions and experimentation. Guro’s account shows us that a decisive factor for the performer’s adopting the choreographic approach is being able to analyze and give feedback during rehearsal. Guro has a need to situate herself in a common understanding, not only of the contents, but also with a shared examination of the subject. Ayelen’s method seems to entail working with what is suggested rather than explicitly stated, which causes paradoxes or divergent points of view. In the following, Guro recalls a discussion with the choreographer and responds to an instruction: *“If you ask the performers to be free and play with material in a unison, you cannot expect the material to stay in a precise, consistent form executed the same way every time. Somehow, it seems that Ayelen wants both”* Guro finds it challenging to play around with choreographic material and at the same time to identically reproduce the gesture. However, one can view this paradox as a driving force and a tool of interpretation from the point of view of the choreographer.

Thus, part of this process is up to the dancers. They are free to invent their own tools and strategies. Here, Dawid shares his approach to the project: *“My job is to allow my body to guide me and move according to a theme that I can have in mind. I watch my body moving, and I take information about what I need at that moment ... It’s often the first thing I do. In the case of Primal, I knew it was going to be a non-linear piece when I began creating my sequence. Therefore, I couldn’t maintain this continuity from one state to another – it would be interrupted. For the first part of the piece, I needed to find my own flow but with the need to understand it.”* Dawid approaches this creative process from another angle. It is not the understanding that guides his way of thinking about the composition; he accepts that he doesn’t understand all the elements. Moreover, he interprets this first part as a period for self-presentation: *“First, the main concern at that moment is to show ourselves to the audience in an almost exhibitionistic way. The awareness of being all together in this type of action – it gives me strength. You are not alone! I don’t need to look at my fellow dancers, or even touch*

*them. I just know that our very existence is linked at that moment in that space, even though everyone is doing their own job. Afterwards, when I see their expressions, how they are involved with their bodies, and how their presences are manifested, I am inspired and encouraged. I say to myself, 'If you go, I go too!'*" The fact that the other dancers are performing this same task encourages Dawid to become fully engaged in it. Thus the action makes sense because it is activated collectively. This feeling of being together and of shared intimacy is furthermore also referred to, in the feedback to rehearsals, as "togetherness". It is the subject of a discussion of what it represents for each of them. In this way, the others serve as both a support and also sources of inspiration. Dawid develops this idea further by describing one of these strategies used in empty moments: *"There are times when you have nothing really precious, strong, or great to show. When I'm confronted by this kind of impasse, the strategy I found was to let my imagination wander. You can think of anything at all, your lunch, anything you want. But I myself chose this: when I look at a person, it gives me a specific emotion, a state, or a certain type of relationship. I try to maximize what I feel and see how it can transform me. Anger, pity, surprise, incomprehension – I try to take something out of it."* The imagination and free association between a person and a specific emotional state both give Dawid a resource to generate his movements. In the section called "Museum Part", the choreographer's instruction was: *"You have to look at each other, try to communicate with the others by that look, while your torso is always turned in a different direction and you move towards each other."* Dawid tells us, *"We establish a relation with each other and we try to express or address something even though we don't know how; therefore, compared to the first part, it adds a level of what could be some form of communication."* Being gathered in the center of the stage, their proximity to each other makes all these attempts to address and relate to each other all the more visible.

The dancer Sebastian has absorbed the intention of *Primal* and tells of the unfolding of the piece with regard to this notion of communication: *"I feel that the piece raises the question of how to develop tools to communicate with each other to an increasing degree. We (the dancers) are these primitive beings, these creatures, neither humans nor animals. I feel that I start the piece from a very individual universe – it's my reality, my world. Then we come to this part of group respiration that starts to connect us with each other a little more. All individuals or creatures find a community, or at least a group. And in the end, we meet in this part called 'the museum' which is for me the attempt to create a language. We are increasingly trying to find who we are. And when the vibration from stamping on the floor occurs, it's like communicating with space, the outside world. The piece Primal is to be this individual seen through these multiple languages, to find a kind of community and build a new language. I invented this simple story just for myself, but it's more of a physical story."* The question of communication between beings through non-verbal language could be considered the heart of *Primal's* subject matter. In view of this description, I cannot avoid linking this theme to the method used by Ayelen Parolin. Is there any dancer who couldn't describe the way Ayelen would sometimes start a sequence of movements and follow it through with her own body? It is as if corporeal enunciation were the most direct language – a way to avoid uttering something that would become too explicit if expressed in words. That is to say, in this way a form of complexity or elusiveness would be maintained by the movement. The corporeal expression would then open up a multiplicity of possible interpretations, sowing a confusion of meaning. The choreographer led the team with very precise decisions, sometimes like intuitive trial-and-error, combining the simple and the complex in the heart of a structure where chaos and unison are two sides of the same coin. Dawid recalls this intention: *"Ayelen came up with an idea. She works around incomprehensible notions such as energy, intensity ... Even if it was not clear from the*

*beginning, she pushed them to the end of the process without compromise. Without this clarity and honesty with herself, she would not have followed her choices. The difficulty when working with a group is that you need to communicate something that you may not really know before experiencing it. In this type of work, the choreography needs to be well composed but the priority for us dancers is what we bring to the stage, our presence and our commitment.”*

## CONCLUSION

*the departed Heart* and *Primal* are two choreographic pieces that were developed concurrently. In Carte Blanche’s Bergen studio, the teams worked in parallel, with the aesthetic worlds juxtaposed in resonance or dissonance with each other. Each group had its own way of approaching the different strata of collaboration between choreographer and composer, with the performers, and with the artistic and technical teams of the company. Each process was composed of synergies, but also knots to unravel, solutions to arrive at, and still-unresolved issues. Both projects ultimately comprise *Echo Flux*, a two-sided program. One of the pieces can refer to the other as its mirror or as its opposite. Beyond a simplistic binarity, the pairing brings out parallels, complementarities, echoes, divergences, and aspects of otherness.

The creative processes of *Primal* and *the departed Heart* convey two different approaches to the relationship between dancers and creative teams. For *the departed heart*, choreographer Alban Richard initiated the process by bringing the performers into a field of references. This creation is composed of both practices to be incorporated and works taken from cinema, literature, and painting, on the theme of melancholy. On the one hand, the performers’ ability is called upon to experiment with different “tasks”, and they learn to pay close attention to movement. Through various manipulations, they develop an awareness of their breathing and of the motor of gesture. On the other hand, each performer is associated with a film excerpt or painting that he or she must analyze and incorporate in a personal way. Their creative work in this regard colors the piece with atmospheres and emotions, and opens up other tools of interpretation. In other words, the performers of *the departed Heart* slip into a world that they are supposed to make their own. In *Primal*, the relationship between choreographer and performer is a different one. The choreographer Ayelen Parolin invites each dancer to contribute their own gestural vocabulary by giving a very open basic instruction which consists of choosing fifteen movements from various styles. The dancer brings in the material, which will then be modified under the choreographer’s direction. He or she is asked, to the best of their ability, to construct and choose ways to move, to expand and blend in this choreographic material over the course of rehearsals. While the movements are personal, nonetheless, the process of appropriation from the context of creation is a decisive step in having the meaning emerge. The performers may be strangers to their own gestural material if they do not find ways to interpret it. However, the choreographer proposes various collective tasks that are based on physicality, imagination, and rhythm all at the same time. She was also inspired by the workshop with Sámi shaman Eirik Myrhaug in the early creative stages of the project, an experience that provided a point of reference for the group as a whole. By approaching these two choreographic processes concomitantly, one can read two ways of structuring the work for the group and the individual. After a strong collective experience alongside the shaman, choreographer Ayelen Parolin will first call upon the individuality of

each performer by having them put together a personal sequence and then afterwards subjecting it to collective constraints. By contrast, choreographer Alban Richard builds up the listening skills of the group by practicing several tasks in a rehearsal laboratory and then offers the performers more personalized research inspired by other works of art. The stages of the process are not the same, but both projects develop strategies to reveal the individual and the collective at the same time.

The staging of the respective final works also convey the relationship between the individual and the collective in different ways. *Primal* exhibits varieties of individuality that collide and end up constituting an ensemble. Trajectories delineate as much isolation as agreement, dependence as interdependence. Beyond language, the performers explore their sonorous bodies as they indulge in diverse, extreme, intense states. The stage is naked, like a blank page that can accommodate the infinity of emotions and human behaviors. *the departed Heart* plays with different bubbles of solitude that intermittently converge in moments of unison. The superimposing of different states makes it possible to read relations between individuals: duos appear, coexist, or collapse. The depth of the choreography emerges from the composition according to plan, accentuated by the set design, with platforms of various heights. The amplification of the breath plunges us into an intimacy with each character who experiences breathlessness, melancholy, a dying breath, anguish, excitement, gasps, frenzy, a return to calm, then agitation, possession ...

Through different entrance doors, the two halves of the program render intense states palpable. While *the departed Heart* maintains a contained energy, *Primal* ends up releasing it. The two pieces of thirty-five minutes are juxtaposed with one another, with an intermission between them. The audience of *Echo Flux* is thereby immersed in two aesthetic worlds with which they can then resonate or enter into dialogue. At the exit, will they possibly hear echoes from one sonic atmosphere to another, will they see fluxes in common directions or divergent ones, will the contours of memory be blurred when inhabited by the gestures of the two choreographies? Will *Echo Flux* be an experience of both the autonomy of one dance work and its reflection with regard to another?

Aurélia Fradin, Septembre 2019.

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