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# where cross-cultural artistic practices meet in Madrid

by cristiane bouger

Defined by the choreographer Juan Domínguez as a program instead of a festival, In-Presentable had its 6th edition in 2008. In the position of artistic director and programmer, Domínguez rethinks In-Presentable's format every single year and never repeats the earlier program structure. It is his particular method to avoid the risk of a closed format. Through this option he searches for rupture with the purpose of creating plural spaces and new artistic possibilities rather than establishing solidity to the event.

In a broader artistic context, Madrid is a traditional city in which contemporary artists have to deal with the scarcity of polyvalent venues to work in. Traditional theatres, museums and galleries prevail in the city and most of them are still focused on the object of art. According to Domínguez, the lack of interest in the frontier arts by presenters and curators is due to the late democracy transition in Spain.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) General Francisco Franco and his Nationalist Army received the support of Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini to conduct his fascist ideas. In 1939 with the victory of Franco over the Republicans, the country entered into a dictatorial regime that came to an end only with the death of its dictator, in 1975. Afterwards, the transition to democracy conducted by the monarchy regime of King Juan Carlos was slow<sup>[1]</sup> and the fascist decades had already caused cultural decline in Spain, breaking it apart from the artistic development and tendencies of the rest of the Europe.

Later, the economic crisis in 1992<sup>[2]</sup> caused the more experimental alternatives that emerged in the late 80s and early 90s to fade away. The right wing that ruled the country at that time opted to give incentives to more traditional art forms like folk dance. In those circumstances, emerging artists with contemporary perspectives on performance found no support for developing their works.

This gap between what was happening in Spain and the artistic course in the rest of Europe caused the departure of several artists, including Juan Domínguez; his home changed to New York, London and Berlin, respectively.

Despite this premise, some artists developed their work in Spain at the same time they were connected to other countries in Europe. A significant event in this context was the annual program *Desviaciones* (Madrid, 1997-2001), organized by Blanca Calvo<sup>[3]</sup>, La Ribot and José A. Sánchez. Working against the isolation and invisibility the local established art model confined them to, these artists created a space of exchange to support their practices and dialogue.

In 2003 In-Presentable originated at La Casa Encendida, an institution supported by Caja Madrid Obra Social<sup>[4]</sup>. Initially, Domínguez presented a solo work proposal to Laura Gutiérrez Tejón who at the time coordinated the Performance Department at La Casa Encendida.

Accepting to present Domínguez' performance, Laura asked him to bring a wider context to his work by suggesting he invite other artists to be presented there. Her suggestion was embraced: the collective P5<sup>[5]</sup>, composed of five choreographers, spent two months creating five solo works to be presented at the one-week program Domínguez created under the name of *Procesos (Coreográficos)/(Choreographic) Processes*. A diverse audience attended the performances and an annual event was then imagined.

Since then, every year a different program is conceived. The programs created have no specified content or theme, but a concept that deals with the artistic necessities Domínguez identifies in Madrid and abroad. However, Juan Domínguez does not consider himself to be a curator, since In-Presentable does not count on a budget to cover travel expenses for him to visit festivals in other countries. For this reason, he considers it to be more accurate to think about himself as a programmer.<sup>[6]</sup>

The independence of the European conventional market is another central characteristic of In-Presentable. Domínguez is more interested in creating partnerships with festivals that have a similar philosophy. Current collaborators include *Panorama RioDança*, in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil); *Mugatxoan*, at Arteleku, in San Sebastián (Spain) and at *Fundação Serralves* in Porto (Portugal) and the residency program at *Aula de Danza Estrella Casero* (Alcalá de Henares University/Spain and La Casa Encendida).

In celebration of the 5th anniversary of the program and its achievements during this period, the book-DVD *In-Presentable 03-07* was published in 2007<sup>[7]</sup>. The main publication's goal consists of documenting the importance of



PHOTO: ENRIQUE ESCORZAMERCEDES RODRÍGUEZ

the cross-field artworks presented and their projection on the artistic, economic, social and political spheres. Its texts and graphic design were conceived with the intent to come from an artistic practice rather than a theoretical one. The result is an accumulation of artistic perspectives and diverse contemporary methodologies of work revealed through conversations among artists (Los Torreznos, Gary Stevens, Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion), notes of work (Xavier Le Roy, Ulf Aminde, Amaia Urra), a dictionary list by Gustavo Ciríaco, texts by Blanca Calvo, Marten Spangberg, Isabel de Naverán, Tor Lindstrand and an extensive photo documentation of those years.

In his foreword to the book, Domínguez reveals his apprehension to write in a formal medium. Solving and subverting this formality, he presents in his text five different endings to his own introduction. Repeating the text first presented, each new ending is graphically transformed by the absence of words like "nobody" that one can read on the first version of the text and just identify for the blank space that remains on the new ending. Unreadable tiny fonts and the total absence of any text configure other endings, revealing that the opened territory of an artistic practice is clearly reflected in Domínguez's poetic theoretical incursion.

## IN-PRESENTABLE 08

Thinking about what could result from the closer co-existence of different thoughts and cultures, Domínguez wanted to understand what kind of shared space could exist between the work of artists who came from such potent and diverse cities like Rio de Janeiro, New York, London, Vienna, Paris and Madrid, despite the cultural, market and geographical differences that lie among those cities.

The idea was establishing a certain context to the works presented in a way that the audience could step out of its own reference circle and reflect upon another artistic reality.

Given this scenario, a confluence of diverse works and methodologies was presented and post-show talks were conducted at La Casa Encendida from June 12-22, 2008<sup>[8]</sup>.

Critical perspectives on the Brazilian identity and social constructs were brought to In-Presentable by the choreographers Luiz de Abreu and Marcela Levi. Abreu presented his *O Samba do Crioulo Doido (Samba of a Crazy Creole Man)* in which a curtain of Brazilian flags occupied the performance space. Working with eroticism, samba and Carnival, what he defines as the clichés and stereotypes concerning the Afro-Brazilian body, Abreu questions the identity of African Diaspora. On the other hand, Levi performed *in-organic*, a work in which a bull head, 92 feet of pearl strings and a bicycle's red lamp were put together on the space, constantly (re) creating meaning to reflect on memories, affection and the imagination of the artist.

The documentary *Mestre Humberto* by the filmmaker Rodrigo Savastano and *Hoje é Dia de Baile* by Delano Valentim showed the cultural context of Rio de Janeiro, talking about the traditional Lapa neighborhood, samba, candomblé (an Afro-Brazilian religion) and Brazilian R&B.

From New York, Maria Hassabi and Hristoula Harakas presented the instigating *Gloria* (a piece that could be seen in New York at P.S. 122 in November 2007 and in January 2008). With a rigorous physicality not usually found in most of the European conceptual works, *Gloria* presented a completely different movement quality to the festival.

The feature documentary *Community, Activism and the Downtown Scene*, an independent documentary about the experimental scene in New York (Brazil/USA) I filmed before moving to the town, brought the context of this specific scene to the program. The documentary shows the changes in the social, political, cultural and aesthetic arenas during the last four decades and how geographical artistic migration, the role of community, feminist activism, AIDS and the economy have transformed the experimental arts in NY. Among the artists who participated in it are the choreographers Dean Moss, Jennifer Monson and Tere O'Connor, the performer Lynn Book, the collective Guerrilla Girls and La MaMa's founder and Artistic Director Ellen Stewart.

The installation *Setting Up the Banquet*, by the Taiwanese New York-based artist Hong-Kai Wang, was exhibited during the second week of the program. The work was based on the immigrant Chinese community living in Madrid, and used multi-sound channels to reproduce the talking of the tables of a huge communal street banquet.

New Art Club, a company composed of Pete Shenton and Tom Roden from London, presented *The Visible Man*, a work in which the performers appear and "disappear" on the stage. The tactic consisted of asking the audience to close their eyes when one of the performers says "close" and open them, when he says, "open." The basic game created a non-linear narrative, defying, according to them, the "basic laws of physics." Also, the narrative could be subverted by the spectators who decided to invert the rules of the game, closing their eyes when they were supposed to open them and vice-versa. In this case, the work turns into a sequence of scene constructions instead of the scenes themselves.

The Croatian company BadCO, based in Zagreb, presented *Memories Are Made of This... performance notes*. The company, formed by four choreographers, two dramaturges and one philosopher, created their work influenced by a quote on intelligence by F. Scott Fitzgerald<sup>[9]</sup>. The title of the piece was borrowed from Dean Martin's homonymous song.

Mette Edvardsen, from Norway, brought the minimalist solo work *Time Will Show (detail)*, and the video *Stills*. The performance happened simultaneously live and intermediated by one TV set through which the pre-recorded footage of the work performed at that very same space is shown. Even though Edvardsen did not have any influence from *Zen for Film*, the state created in her work, summed with the vast white room in which it was performed, reminded me of this video of an unexposed reel of film made by Nam June Paik in 1962-1964 in response to John Cage's 4'33"<sup>[10]</sup>.

Bojana Cvejic, from Serbia, lectured *Practice, Practice, Practice! Settling for Less, because we can't do more?*, while Isabel de Naverán, from Bilbao/Spain moderated the lecture *Como Hacer Un Evento/Encuentro de Una Hora (How to Make An One-Hour Event/Meeting)* with Sandra Cuesta and Larraitz Torres.

From Spain, the program included *Poder (Power)*, by the duo Los Torreznos, composed by Jaime Vallauré and Rafael Lamata (Madrid), the video works *La Otra Mujer* and *A Long Way Back*, by Sandra Cuesta (Basque Country), and *Permanent Vacation Versión* by Larraitz Torres and Myriam Pérez. Additionally, *The Remaking Of.*, by Paula Caspão, from Portugal, was also part of the screening program.

*Tender Forever*, by French singer and multi-instrumentalist Melanie Valera, closed In-Presentable 08 with a concert divided between original songs and a teenage-like lesbian talking about the beauty of Spanish women.

Undoubtedly, people who visited La Casa Encendida during those two weeks could join in a diverse event. Tickets cost a symbolic amount (3 euros), giving the general public a chance to attend the performances, screenings and lectures.

On the last day of the program Domínguez already had plans for the next two years. In 2009 he will bring to In-Presentable a mix of emerging and established artists who participated in ex.e.r.ce. in Montpellier/France in 2008. In 2010 he intends to invite artists who left Spain and whose works are currently based in South America.

Beyond that, the near-future project relies on a collective of ten young artists who have been supported by the program in the last years. The idea is that, from this point on, they will be in charge of publishing texts and programming performance and video activities during the whole year at La Casa Encendida.

The effort and work developed by artists like Juan Domínguez, Blanca Calvo, La Ribot and Jose Sánchez have been crucial to connect Spanish artists and a non-specialized audience to other artistic circuits. In addition, it has connected artists who share similar interests, promoting the exchange of ideas, methodologies, critical view and research. The cohesion Domínguez presents in his programming assignment and the support given by La Casa Encendida make this event a safe home for non-traditional works, allowing a cross-cultural convergence of emerging and experienced artists.

Summed to these achievements, through promoting this circuit of ideas and interdisciplinary aesthetics, In-Presentable empowers the notion that to give incentives to contemporary dance and live art works can resonate far beyond the boundaries of any conventional institutional media plan.

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#### FOOTNOTES:

(1) Some historians think that the transition to the democracy in Spain was operated in a short period of time. In the chapter "The Post-Franco Era" in *Spain: A Country Study*, edited by Eric Solsten and Sandra W. Meditz, we can read: "The democratization that Franco's chosen heir, Juan Carlos, and his collaborators peacefully and legally brought to Spain over a three-year period was unprecedented. Never before had a dictatorial regime been transformed into a pluralistic, parliamentary democracy without civil war, revolutionary overthrow, or defeat by a foreign power." [Unpaginated text found at <http://countrystudies.us/spain/25.htm>]. Since the Constitution of 1978, Spain is a Parliamentary Monarchy.

(2) In 1992 a major European currency crisis forced the devaluation of the *peseta* while labor unrest, unemployment and corruption scandals increased in Spain.

(3) Since 1998, Blanca Calvo and Ion Munduate have been the artistic directors and programmers of Mugatxoan (at Arteleku, San Sebastian/Spain and at Fundação Serralves, Porto/Portugal). In the language Euskera, Mugatxoan means "in the frontier."

(4) Caja Madrid Obra Social is a branch of Caja Madrid, a financial institution, in Spain.

(5) The fundamental thought of P5 was based on sharing the creative process as part of their work methodology. The collective was formed by Eva Meyer-Keller, Mette Edvardsen, Alexandra Bachzetsis, Cuqui Jerez and Juan Domínguez.

(6) Artists whose works surpass conventional artistic strategies are welcome to contact Juan Domínguez. [www.in-presentable.com]

(7) DOMÍNGUEZ, Juan. Org. In-Presentable 03-07. Translation by Polisemia SL and Virginia Fusco. La Casa Encendida, 2007. 195 pgs.

(8) I opted to briefly mention all of the works included in the program, instead of writing more extensively on one or two of them. Since I joined In-Presentable for four days, I restrained myself to talk a little bit more about the works I saw or previously knew about.

(9) "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Crack-Up", 1936.



PHOTO: ENRIQUE ESCORZAMERCEDES RODRIGUEZ



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(10) *Zen For Film*, by Nam June Paik consists of a 16mm unexposed reel and when projected it shows no

more than the white light and accumulated dust on the film and the dust caught in the projector's light.

#### MONTPELLIER: 6M1L CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

*politeness rarely enforced, ability to be purposefully funny, complex personal history in dance, tendency to wear clothes that are either clashing in color or don't fit, foreign born, or ex-patriate. (CP 4)*

*It's chaotic, overwhelming, tiring, exciting, stimulating and productive in its ineffectiveness. (MI 4)*

*When my mother read the booklet about 6M1L/ex.e.r.ce.08, she said "I don't understand what you plan to do, but I understand that you will work all the time." (XLR)*

*What concrete changes can you already identify in your work being here in 6M1L/ex.e.r.ce.? (NM 2)*

*I have separated my self, my ideas, and my drives a little more. I sense that my interests are the same but sharper, more consolidated, more crystalized, less reactionary or constructed in terms of influence and circumstances. When the normal environmental factors that tend to over-determine my work are removed, I am in a strange kind of no-place that allows me to experience thinking and moving, the movement of thought, the appearance of desires, in a more isolated fashion. Ideas emerge more like beacons than shooting stars and the longer they hold my interest the more I know I have to investigate them. And yet I feel unequipped to investigate them because I am dissatisfied with the methods I know, am familiar with, or have tried before. I recognize the need to invent new modes of analysis and development. In part because of the fact that we repeat, reaffirm, or recirculate what we among us can claim as knowledge, I feel pushed harder NOT to use it in fact, but to let it rest as history, as*

*tried-and-true. By exhausting what modes I have at my disposal to think through something, or by avoiding them all together, I have the feeling that clearer, subtler, perhaps even more arbitrary desires emerge. (EB 1)*

*6M1L/ex.e.r.ce. has made me more critical of criticality and as a consequence driven me to suspend the development of a theoretically informed personal practice. (NQ 1)*

*What do you consider the potential of what we do to be? Do you think it makes a difference beyond the experience itself? (MI 2)*

*Group dynamics are complex and tricky so they have to be refreshed often but it is a good way to be in the world, to receive information, and to get the sensation that there are many realities, that none of them is the good one, but they can co-exist and generate further possibilities. Something very important for me right now is the concept of accessibility, openness, sharing. I think that small group dynamics are closed, dangerous, and can create a micro reality with a small impact for the idea of change. To work in advance on how education can influence the future context in which we will be able to inscribe and make accessible our work made me think about a responsible attitude towards the future in relation to a community. (JD 1)*

For more information on 6M1L and ex.e.r.ce08, visit [www.6M1L.com](http://www.6M1L.com).

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