

Michael O'Connor
awaitingdog.com

Artistic Dossier 2015



Summoning imagery is one thing,
but creating a language of dance
is an entirely different one.
O'Connor is proficient of both.

-Michaela Preiner/2014



Michael O'Connor

Biography

(USA/AT) is a choreographer, dancer, improviser and teacher living in Vienna since 2007. In 2005, he received his **BFA** in Modern Dance from the **University of Utah**. During his education, Michael opened doors at the university for artistic research and experimental choreography, receiving assistantships and grants, presented work at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research twice, and spoke alongside Stephan Koester at the keynote presentation on arts research.

Michael was a long time company member with **Cie. Willi Dorner** from 2003-2010 performing in a variety of stage works and setting the renowned piece *Bodies in Urban Spaces* in over 30 cities. He was listed in the **2008 BalletTanz Magazine** as the 'dancer to watch' in Vienna for his own choreographic solo debut *a waiting dog dies*.

Since 2009 Michael is the Vienna branch facilitator for the Field organization which through TanzQuartier Wien (TQW) teaches artists how to give feedback.

In 2010, Michael received a **Turbo Residency** scholarship at ImpulsTanz where he continued his research of his drag persona, Jai Jai Sincere. Jai Jai Sincere made her contemporary debut at ImpulsTanz 2011 where she performed an adaptation of **Deborah Hay's NEWS**. In 2011 Michael also premiered his work *You are the Subject of my Seeing* at TQW and had a residency at **The Place in London** as a Carte Blanche participant of the **ModulDance** program.

Since 2013 Michael has taught creative practice and contemporary technique at **SNDO in Amsterdam**. He has also taught technique in **Henny Jurriens Foundation** in Amsterdam and **Maraméo** in Berlin. Other teaching positions have been guest faculty twice at **Arizona State University**, **SEAD** and festivals such as DanceUmbrella, Philly Live Arts and Tanz in August among others. In 2012, Michael taught with neuroscientist Corinne Jola the workshop *Technologies of Love* at **ImpulsTanz**.

His works have been presented at TQW, ImpulsTanz, WUK, BRUT and Burgenland Tanztage, as well as off-spaces in Vienna in order to help promote artist run organizations.

Currently he is an **AMCh Choreography** master candidate student (2013-2015) at **Amsterdam School of the Arts** with a focus on cognitive science. He has been invited to present his research in TQW at the Intersection of Arts and Science program, Festival of Art as Research, in Germany and most recently his paper *Love is an Action* at the Center for Dance Research in Coventry, UK. In 2014 his piece *TERTIARY* was nominated for the **Prix d'Jardin** in the **8:Tension** series at the ImpulsTanz Festival.

He has also worked with David Zambrano, Georg Blaschke, Alain Buffard, Paul Wenninger and Barbara Kraus.

a waiting dog is the creating company behind Michael O'Connor and has produced:

[*a waiting dog dies*](#)

Gimme more Delsarte

The PArk

[*You are the Subject of my Seeing*](#)

[*NEWS*](#)

[*A General Theory of Love*](#)

[*TERTIARY*](#)

[*Moving Around X*](#)

[*Moving Around X: the x of y*](#)

2009

2010

2010

2011

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

BRUT

Szene Sommer Salzburg

Sugar Space

TanzQuartier Wien

ImpulsTanz

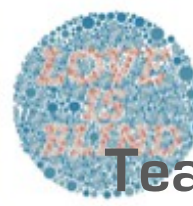
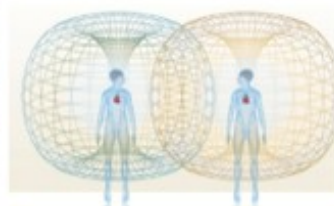
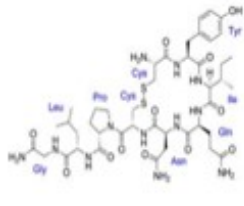
WUK

ImpulsTanz/ Raum 33

Mo.ë

DansMakers Amsterdam





Teaching

Technologies of Love

1-2 weeks

Using the neuroscience of love as a template for movement.

<http://www.impulstanz.com/workshops12/wid2162/en/>

A technical skill is about the ability to make something. Love is the desire to be with another because unity is impossible. It's our attempt at trying. It is an action. We will look at the neuroscience of love as a biological tool that can highlight the precision of our senses. We will look at the mechanisms of how we love, are loved, or obtain our ideal concept of perfect love as creative material that can enrich our artistic output. Our creativity comes in how we try to solve unrealized concepts. The concept changes with more experience. Love is a game. Love is a journey. Love is work. This is not about sex or therapy. Its about cooperation, collaboration and connection. Oxytocin, metaphor and neurons. Sensory awareness and poetry. We have the potential to be our own private neuroscience by examining ourselves in relation to another through attention towards areas involving: **Exchange, Negotiation, Resonance, Synchronicity, Awareness, Modulation and Attunement.** Love is a laboratory. Using improvisation, partnering, contact and individual work, we will investigate and discuss the things you didn't know your body already knew.

Metaphor: Motion and Meaning

1-2 weeks

The workshop focuses on how to translate sound into movement, and concepts into spatial relations and objects that are tangible. We also look at how there are actions embedded in the normal meaning of words, often expressed in gesture. We start by using writing exercises to warm up the mind. What is the color, taste and behavior of TIME? We also draw, charting the dynamics of a song like the seismogram of an earthquake. In our language we sometimes express thought as linear. So by engaging with a linear object like rope, we can use 'Thought as a Rope' to create and embody new metaphors, which allow us to play in the borders of perception, and create new realities; 'my thoughts are smooth', 'my thoughts hurt my hands', 'my thoughts could tie myself up'. Using objects to represent TIME, LIFE, LOVE, THOUGHT we make a metaphorical playground of usually intangible concepts. This allows us to understand a deeper meaning in form and have a greater sense of relationship when working with the object. 2 main image schemas that structure a lot of our every day thought are 'Container' and 'Pathway.' Containers and pathways allow us to use spatial relations to get a sense of the felt meaning of a situation. We also look at the felt sense of the meaning of a word, using our own embodied experience to consciously represent words as actions or movements. By the end, the workshop attempts to reveal how we may have similarities in motivation, but differences in our expression.

FIELDWORK

ongoing or 1x FieldDay

Giving feedback that is helpful for the artist

[www/TQW/Fieldwork/Feedback workshop](http://www.TQW/Fieldwork/Feedback%20workshop)

Do you find when you give feedback you routinely speak about all the elements you did not like? Have you found yourself feeling defensive when receiving feedback from someone? Fieldwork is a method that provides the participants with tools to speak clearly about their opinion and in a way that is helpful for the artist to proceed working. The structure of Fieldwork has two main elements:

1. The work shown, is done so without any explanation and
2. The feedback given is non directorial and non suggestive.

Therefore, the artist allows their work to stand on its own and is able to hear honest, critical feedback as the

Contemporary Technique

daily for 1-2 weeks

[Contemporary class Henny Jurriens 2014 link](#)

[Contemporary class SNDO 2014 short link](#)

[Contemporary class SNDO 2014 long link](#)

Dancing is not about positions because there is no place to arrive to, only places to pass through. A mindset that allows us to risk and enjoy the temporality of movement, becomes functional when held together by awareness and technique; which keeps the dancers' minds open and free to make choices. Through the work we seek to find together where the juice is of each movement. When to breath. Where to relax before it gets difficult. And when to surrender. It's not where you're going, but how you get there that counts.

Creative Practice: Bottom UP

3-6 weeks

[Teaching packet link](#)

Instead of approaching composition or choreography from a theoretical, top-down approach, I am interested in guiding students through a Bottom-UP approach. This means practice and body knowledge guide the explorations. A Bottom-UP approach also means we work as a group before we work as an individual, not only so collaboration skills are learned, but also so students can find their unique voice by going through the group and working in context.

Stealing concepts from social anthropology, we use three concepts as starting points:

Participant Observation, Generalized Reciprocity, and Creative Participation

By observing and participating together, we can breakdown barriers, encourage creative problem-solving and build positive relationships that allow for a higher variation in choreographic approaches and find alternative ways of composing.

In this workshop, improvisation functions as a tool to expand and practice our potential for creativity and communication. Through a variety of ways, we learn to listen and respond with our bodies as our ears. The goal is to bring our trained dance bodies together while not forgetting all of the cultural and social information our daily bodies carry. We seek to strengthen the intelligence of our professionally trained body and maintain the natural instincts of our non-performance bodies. We meet as professionals with a history of training in our bodies, but we also meet as two humans occupying the same space at that moment with the potential for anything to happen. The dialogue begins with the smallest simplest touch.

Our goal is to take people and their practices seriously and to pay attention to the detail of what they say and do. We maintain responsibility for ourselves and those around us, giving as much space and time to stillness as the movement so we can stay tuned for the possibility of anything to happen.

Choreography

Moving Around X: the x of y 2015

60 mins [Vimeo link](#)

Choreography/Concept: Michael O'Connor
Performance: Samuel Feldhandler, Michael O'Connor
Music: Samuel Feldhandler
Dramaturgical Advice: Guy Cools



Photo: Niels Weijer.

Moving Around X 2014

60 mins [vimeo link](#)

Choreography/Concept: Michael O'Connor
Performance: Michael O'Connor, Karin Pauer
Music: Alexander Kasses
Visual Design: Alexander Jackson Wyatt
Dramaturgical Advice: Guy Cools

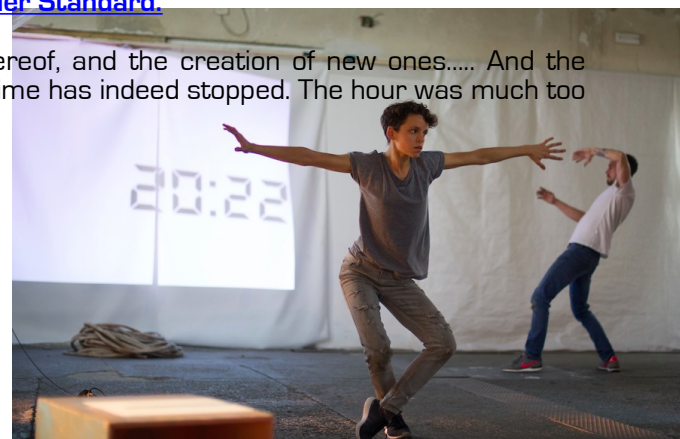
What is the quality of your thought? What is the rope-ness of a rope? MOVING AROUND X is a performance event focusing on a psycho-geography of our poetic understandings. The space becomes a virtual metaphorical landscape and its possible to see our language in action. Thoughts run slowly between my legs. Time parts my lips and presses on my tongue. Love is a movement with no smell. X Is not the unknown. Instead it is a known subject matter that is constantly shifting and changing, presenting itself in different forms. If we had different bodies, we would have different thoughts.

Reviews

"With *Moving Around X*, O'Connor more than accomplishes everything one could hope for in a contemporary dance piece. It is a work driven by its own contradictions, one that constantly creates poetic imagery and that confronts the spectator with associations that cannot be shared with anyone." – [Michaela Preiner/ European Cultural News](#)

"*Moving Around X* creates an experience that makes tangible how fragile is the relationship between reality and perception. And that the margins created by this fragility allow actions which fracture norms and thus prevent the hardening of social fabric." – [Helmut Ploebst/ der Standard](#).

"*Moving Around X* is about metaphor, the deformation thereof, and the creation of new ones..... And the audience may view and marvel. And realize in surprise that time has indeed stopped. The hour was much too short." – [Dita Rudle/ Tanz.net](#)



TERTIARY 2013-2014

[8:tension] Young Choreographers
Nominated for the prestigious
Prix Jardin d'Europe

60 mins
[vimeo link](#)

Concept: Michael O'Connor

Choreography & Performance: Raul Maia, Michael O'Connor, Karin Pauer

Sound: Alexander Kasses

Production Manager: Claire Granier

Supported by: Wien Kultur, Raum 33, BMUKK, TanzQuartier Wien, theatercombinat, Mumbling Fish.



TERTIARY examines how the building blocks of empathy become a visual-tactile tool connecting the performers to each other in the same way they connect to the audience. In neuroscientific theories, the borders between where one person stops and another begins are blurred. There are no interacting minds or brains but only interacting bodies or persons.

1. The artist intuitively exploits the brain's potential to allow multiple areas to influence what is perceived. 2. Incongruities in illogical stories spur the brain to look for patterns it might not otherwise detect.

Reviews

As far as human behavior, perception is often a deceptive matter. Especially when empathy comes into conflict with imaginings. This tension is performed by three very different but equally charismatic personalities, with great sensitivity and almost an equally strong sense of irony. "

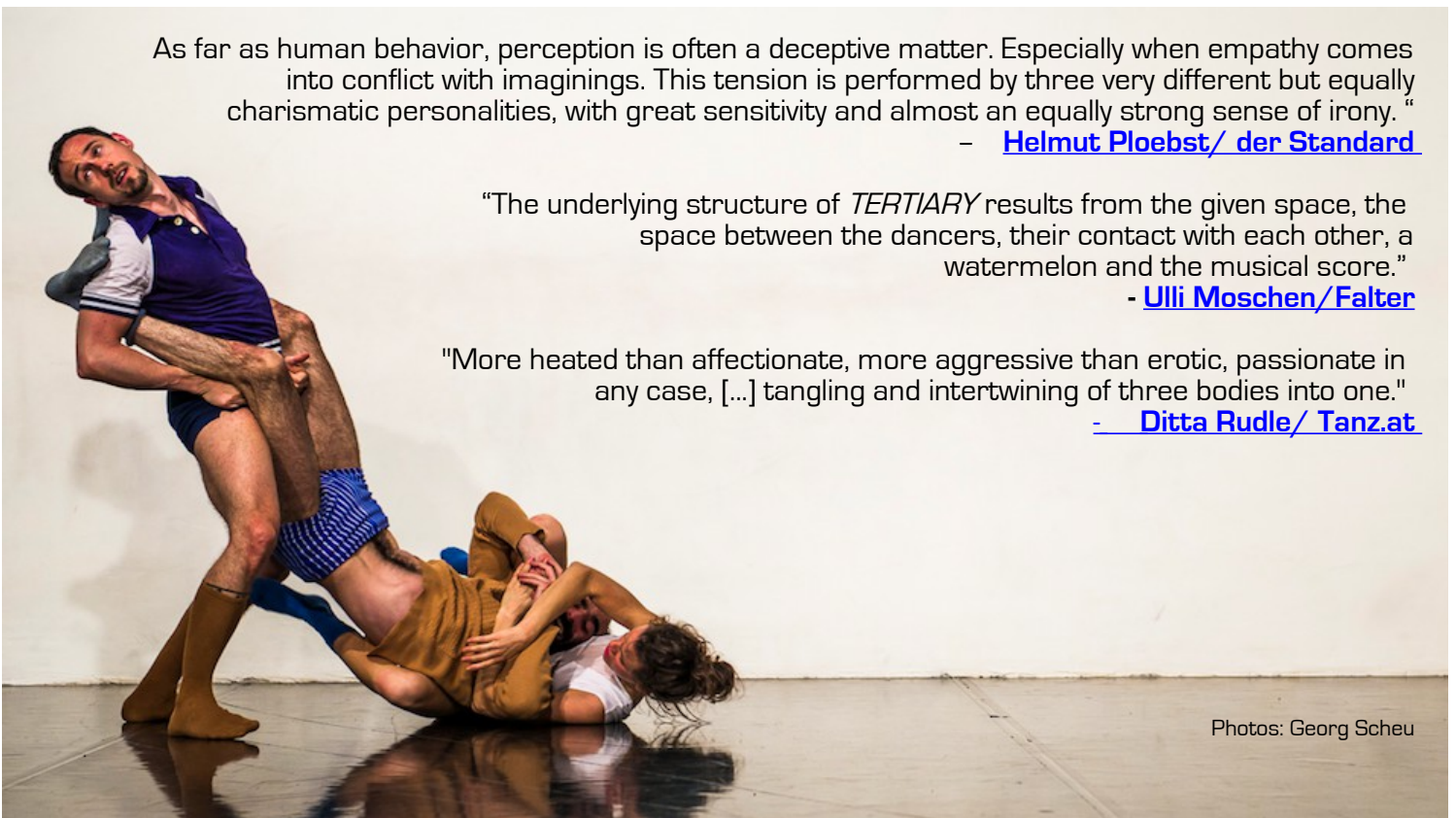
- [Helmut Ploebst/ der Standard](#)

"The underlying structure of *TERTIARY* results from the given space, the space between the dancers, their contact with each other, a watermelon and the musical score."

- [Ulli Moschen/ Falter](#)

"More heated than affectionate, more aggressive than erotic, passionate in any case, [...] tangling and intertwining of three bodies into one."

- [Ditta Rudle/ Tanz.at](#)



Photos: Georg Scheu

A General Theory of Love 2012

[more info](#)

60 mins

[Vimeo part 1](#)

[Vimeo part 2](#)

Concept: Michael O'Connor

Choreography/Performance: Michael O'Connor, Brandon Gonzalaz

Vocal Performance: Inertia DeWitt // **Music Composition:** B. Gonzalez

Supported by: Department of Cultural Affairs Vienna MA7, WUK Vienna, Herberger College of the Arts - ASU.



Photos: David Payr

Can a stage be a place to access human kinds most desired experience?

A General Theory of Love - Michael O'Connor and Brandon Gonzalez attempt to challenge over a period of two months what is taught to be our final arrival. Based on the latest discoveries of neurosciences, they aim to cultivate love by creating an environment where their body systems can synchronize.

Reviews

What started out slowly, is now obvious. Gestural pain and collapses make it clear that the relationship has come to an end. A few moments later, in the most beautiful and touching phase of the evening, again raised to be on a positive level. Those who previously did not know - for the initial question should have been answered. These are the same rules, mechanisms and conventions to

same-sex and heterosexual relationships...

- [Michaela Preiner/ European Cultural News](#)

Where as the topic of nature stimulates political performance, the topic of love in Michael O'Connor's piece is treated rather privately. This is why A General Theory of Love, with Inertia de Witt singing so touchingly, and O'Connor and Gonzalez dancing so tenderly, seems to be more of a pragmatic answer to the crisis of romantic love. Interlaced with quotations from an interview with

US physics nobel laureate Richard Feynman, the sensitive poetry of the piece turns into a statement that could again be paraphrasing the title of Hessel's book: "Touch each other!"

- [Helmut Ploebst.](#)



You are the Subject of my Seeing 2011

45 mins

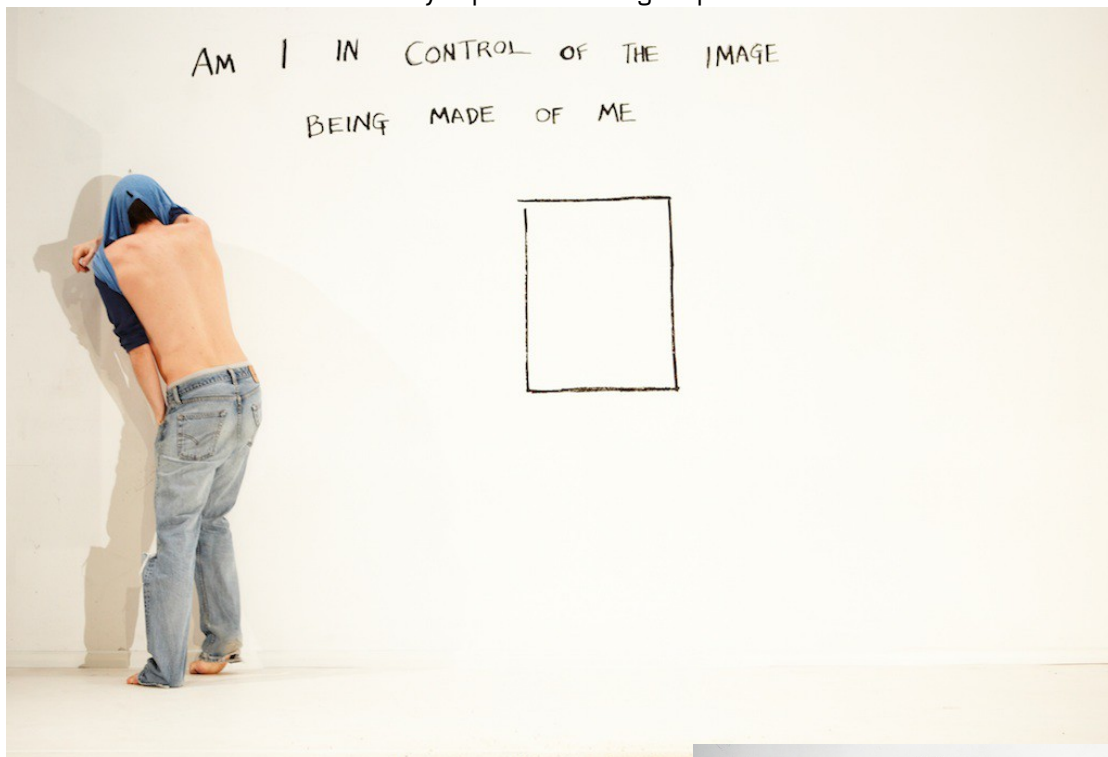
[Trailer](#)
[Full](#)

Concept and Performance: Michael O'Connor
Music: Tommy James & the Shondells, Vivaldi, Gin Wigmore.
Support by: TURBO Residenz, ImPulsTanz 2010.



Photos: David Payr

Body and mind hold memory of the future. Living in desire and lamenting in the past. We exist in relation to events that have already happened and will eventually happen. Harboring tension by teetering on memories and anticipations, we are actually thrown into the present moment which my body and mind can't actually comprehend. Focusing on elements such as pain, muscular endurance, speed, breath or strength, American performer and choreographer Michael O'Connor wants to explore the simple limit of the body, the amount of space that we can occupy and the limit of space that we are put into while on stage. In his new solo, the audience witnesses a state that actually slips from our grasp as soon as we realize it.



Review

"The choreographer glides through the "Ego Tunnel", as the German philosopher Thomas Metzinger from a neuroscientific perspective perceives the construction of the self and the inner body image.

- [Helmut Ploebst/ der Standard.](#)

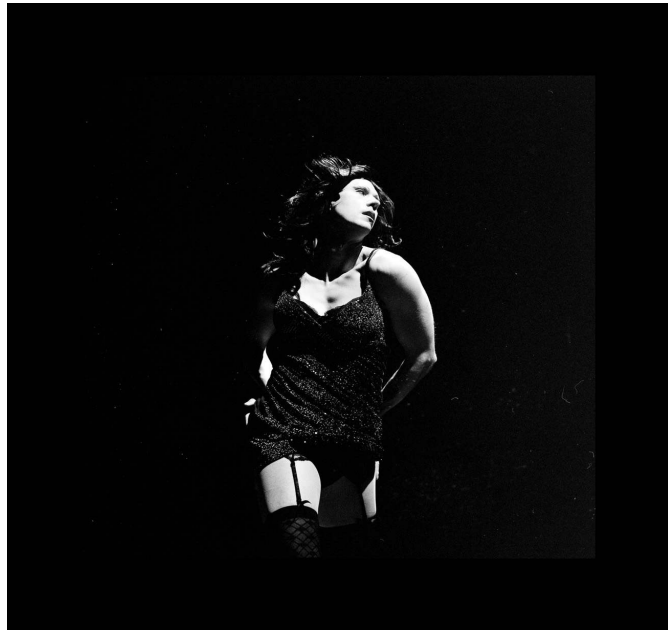


NEWS 2011

30 mins

[Trailer](#)
[Full](#)

Choreography: Deborah Hay
Adaption: Michael O'Connor
Performance: Jai Jai Sincere
Music: Joan Jett & the Blackhearts
Costume Accessory: Gina Drewes.



News is something that interests us when it is shocking, moves us when it is compelling and informs us when it is out of reach. However, more often than not, news is forgotten simply because it is not new anymore. Caught between personal agenda and political activism, Jai Jai Sincere becomes the site of the experiment where personal and political combine. However, exposing perspective is as much as she can do within the balance of art, form and agenda. The political aspect also lies within the audience and their willingness to broaden their viewpoint. Deborah Hay, a member of the New York Judson Dance Theater in the 1960s, created NEWS in 2006 for Michael O'Connor, who after the three month commitment of practicing the solo, passed the work on to Jai Jai Sincere five years later and started the practice again from a different perspective. Accordingly, NEWS is a hymn to queerness, in which the artistic identities of Deborah Hay, Michael O'Connor and Jai Jai Sincere intermingle.



Photos: Bernd Hofbauer (left), Georg Scheu (right)

Review

"Rather, he is able to stimulate the performance as Jai Jai Sincere's reflection on gender conventions and expectations, not only in general but especially in the local field, respectively, European contemporary dance and choreography. This is used to detect a timid, but growing interest in feminist and queer performance. It is hoped that the increased volume of queer choreography in this field of gender binary norms and conventions will cause the dominant question to be asked and subverted. Dancers have an unbeatable weapon - the body. May many Jai Jai Sinceres on the stages of this country come and offer their bodies in motion as "a site of critical reinvention" to the eyes of the spectators. Excerpt: Astrid Peterle // Corpus - Internet Magazine for Dance Choreography Performance.

Additional Performances

2013

David Zambrano.

Tierras Enamoradas.

"*Lands in Love*"-An orgasmic dance rock event



2011

George Blaschke

Somatic Script



Photo: Georg Blaschke

TQW closing season performances

Michael O'Connor



Photo: Michael O'Connor



Michael O'Connor and Cie. Willi Dorner **2003-2010**

Michael O'Connor was a dancer, rehearsal director and artistic assistant.



Photos: Lisa Rastl and others. Bodies in Urban Spaces.

He performed in:

Above under inbetween – Linz 09, 2009

Anywhere, nowhere, somewhere – Nottingham, 2008

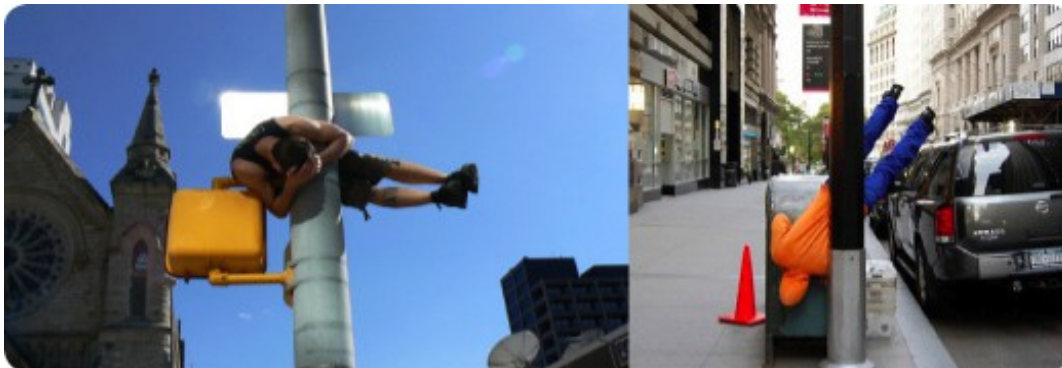
Dolly and Me – Tanzquartier Vienna, 2008

Bodies in Urban Spaces – 2007-2010 in over 30 cities worldwide.

Inbetween – Edinburgh Festival 2008

Hängende Gärten – Vienna, 2004

... Vienna, 2003-2005



Photos: Lisa Rastl and others. Bodies in Urban Spaces.



Photos: Lisa Rastl. Above under inbetween (1); Dolly and Me (2 and 3).

Research

TanzQuartier Wien 2015. MA research support.
Practice as Performance. 2014. Coventry Conference. Love is an Action paper.
TanzQuartier Wien 2013. MA research support.
Festival of Art as Research 2012
Ottersberg, Germany. Presented a lecture on the neuroscience of Love & Performance.
TanzQuartier Wien 2012 Empathic Encounters. Intersection of Art and Science
Arizona State University 2012
Carte Blanche; The Place London. Modul Dance
Developed the practice of Technologies of Love as a contact improvisation teaching tool.
ImpulsTanz 2010 Turbo Residency with mentors Ivo Dimchev and Keith Hennessy.
PAIN Residency for Research in Brussels 2007
TURBO Residency at BRUT in Vienna 2007

Artist Statement

Constantly changing

"His gift was to search in the outer world what nature had laid in his inner world," wrote Goethe about art historian Johann Winckelmann. Choreography interests me as a medium that allows me to use the body as a way of blurring what could be considered the inner and the outer world. I consider the moving body as thought and value it for that.

I have called myself an artistic neuroscientist. I derive practice from cognitive science studies, where performers on stage create poetic experiments. Anthropology, psychology and neuroscience help me get a better understanding of why I do what I do. I'm not a narcissist. My existential crises include other people. 'Why do we exist?' or 'Does this mean the same thing to you?' are ongoing questions that generate material for me. There is an impossibility in knowing one another, as our body language has been crafted from our own personal experiences. I dance in order to understand life—to understand the other. In this way I don't distinguish between choreographing and dancing.

Recent interests could classify me as a love archaeologist. I am curious to look into evolutionary and personal pasts of my body through immaterial things. I have a desire to make immaterial things tangible. On stage I can stop time, hear the unsung, and touch tenderness. Metaphor is a way of thinking. It is not representational. This makes a surrealistic seasoning at times that can be humorous or tragic in my work. I understand things by their qualities. The precision of the human voice is an articulation of texture and diversity I like to translate into movement and flesh.

I work from the position that each performance must be different. Improvisation is a necessity rather than a tool. Works are usually delicately held together. The potential for them to fall apart is on purpose. It's part of how I match the outer world, to feel like the transient inner world. Endings are often inconclusive. Pauses filled with something missing. Ambiguity for me is about an unfinishedness. This allows for multiple interpretations.

I prefer simplicity in style, but layering and complexity in content. I believe there is a fragility that exists between ideas that must be negotiated, so as to provoke meaning for the audience without being explicit. My work is personal but without narrative.

RÉSUMÉ

EDUCATION:

- 2013-15 AMCH Amsterdam. Theatre School
- 2000-05 BFA Modern Dance, University of Utah.

selected experience: abbreviated résumé professional career

CHOREOGRAPHY:

- 2015 • **Moving Around X:** the x of y. DansMakers. Amsterdam
- 2014 • **Moving Around X.** Mo.ë. Wien.
- **TERTIARY. 8:Tension.** Wien.
- 2013 • **TERTIARY.** RAUM33, MAY WIEN.
- 2012 • **A General Theory of Love.** WUK April Wien.
- 2011 • **NEWS** (Deborah Hay adaptation) ImpulsTanz.
- **our are the Subject of my Seeing.** Feb 2011. TQW.
- 2010-11 • **Jai Jai** Drag performances. Queerbeat/Viper Room. Wien.
- 2008 • **a waiting dog dies.** Brut, Imagetanz,
(Ballettanz Magazine Yearbook edition 2008 "young dancer to watch" in Vienna)
- **Gimme more Delsarte.** Tanzmuseum, Szene Salzburg. Austria.
- **The Park.** Self produced evening concert. Sugar Space. SLC, Utah.
- 2006 • **ONLY.** Women's Art Center, Premiere. (2 hour physical theatre trio).
- **So it is.** Set on BrownRice: dance company. Salt Lake City, Utah.
- 2004 • **Dear Everylyn.** Experimental Theatre. University of Utah.

PERFORMANCE:

- 2015 • **TheaterCombinat.** 3rd Step to Ideal Paradise. ImpulsTanz
- 2013 • **David Zambrano.** Tierras Enamoradas. Garage29, Bruxelles, Belgium.
- 2011 • **George Blachke.** Somatic Script. Odeon, Wien.
- 2010 • **Augusto Corrieri.** Photographs of a dance rehearsal. TQW.
- 2003-10 • **Cie. Wili Dorner.** Vienna, Austria. Full company member.
Rehearsal director, artistic assistant, performer.
[...]. Hängende Gärten. Bodies in Urban Spaces. Inbetween.
Dolly and Me. Above under inbetween.
- 2009 • **Barbara Kraus** Auf Teufel, komm raus!
- 2008 • **Paul Wenninger.** *Tubed.* Vienna, Austria.
- 2006 • **Deborah Hay.** *NEWS.* Solo Performance Commissioning Project, Scotland.
- 2004 • **Alain Buffard.** Mauvais Genre. ImpulsTanz.

TEACHING:

- 2013-15 • **SNDO.** Creative Practice/Improvisation & Release Technique.
- 2014 • **Marameo (DE), Henny Juriens (NL).** Release Technique
- 2012 • **Arizona State University.** Residency and Guest faculty. Jan-Feb
- 2011 • **SEAD.** Guest teacher. June. 1 week.
- 2009-15 • **Field Method Wien.** TQW. Fieldmethod Facilitator. Wien
- 2008-10 • **Company class** and international workshop auditions for cie.W
Dorner. Danceumbrella (UK). Tanz im August (DE). Portugal, Spain,
Austria, Belgium.
- 2009 • **33 hours: import export.** TQW open jam. Insel 8.
- 2008 • Performance training. Tanzquartier Wien. Workshop for non dancers.
- 2002-05 • Week long workshops and dance training for youth in Utah and Poland.



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