

Collective Body

(Text: Emanuele Gudi, Aldo Giannotti)

Collective Body is the first stage of the research that developed from the invitation to present a proposal for the programme of the **Living Room Products** at the **Liquid Loft studio**. The context drove us quite naturally towards a reflection around the notions of *body* and *choreography* beyond the field of dance and to the consequent exploration of their implication with everyday life. The approaches and points of view of the visual artists involved did indeed allow us to tackle these concepts by looking at the most diverse scenarios and by presenting '*situation-producing works*' during a three-day event. A set of questions and issues arose during the whole period of the preparation and still remain open but, nonetheless, have been important to direct and inform the research: *What produces a community? What is a collective body and how does it move? How do space, objects and rules design our everyday performances? Is the audience a collective gaze and a collective ear²? Does a collectivity implicitly contain a subversive and entropic power?*

The cohabitation of single bodies within the same environment and the sharing of a common time and space potentially generate a temporary 'choreographic' community, in which social codes and arbitrary behaviours mutually influence one another. The idea of collectiveness implies, therefore, a constant tension and negotiation but at the same time a sense of belonging and affinity among all the individuals who are part of it.

All the presented works concern and broaden these aforementioned issues while also, engaging with further subjects. In ***Kitchen Choreography*** (2005) by **Libia Castro & Ólafur Ólaffson**, cooks and waiters move within the tiny space of a restaurant kitchen under the pressure of the working pace and need to redefine their movements and tempos according to one another. In this *community of circumstances* composed by migrants of different origins, the individual idioms, rhythms and tasks become functional to a common effort. Exactly this common effort is central in the idea of *becoming community*, as the Swiss football fans portrayed by the camera of **Michael Koch** (***We Are The Faithful***, 2005) or in the ***Baden in Der Menge*** (2006) by **San Keller**. The crowds presented express the supportive power of the collectivity while at the same time the artists are able to draw a blurred line between 'the one and the many' as well as between high and low culture.

Social codes and rituals tend to produce foreseeable behaviours and to design precise gestures, poses and movements that can become sort of automatisms. The sign of the cross obsessively danced by **Vladimir Nikolic's** performers on a techno-music beat, reflect on the

¹ Doherty Claire, 'Introduction' in *Situation* edited by Claire Doherty, London, Whitechapel Gallery, Cambridge Massachusset, The MIT Press, 2009 p.13

² Laermans Rudi, *What Makes Dance Contemporary*, Opening Lecture Valeska Gert guest professorship, Institut für Theater Wissenschaft, FU Berlin, 09.12.2008.

bodily expressions that religions and ideologies demand to their followers (*Rhythm*, 2001). The simple action by **Chris Haring** of opening the cellar of his studio - that hosts the closed fire exit of the former GudrunKino - places the visitor in front of a crossroads and seems an invitation to experience what in the collective imaginary is recognized as the moment of emergency; that very moment when the individuals shape into a multitude that moves towards a direction, being it the real escape or the production of a parallel dimension (*Fluchtweg*, 2010). The experiments by **Fabien Giraud** (*The Straight Edge*, 2005) and **Aldo Giannotti** (*Italian Square*, 2008) test the predictability of group behaviours by designing shared places for group performances to happen. The reference to the urban place that Giannotti uses, recall the liveliness of the social gatherings typical of the Italian public space and, together with it, the cultural dimension characterized by voices, gesticulations and relationships. While Giraud's hardcore-punk crowd dances a choreography that alternate violent and bored movements. In both cases, an uncontrollable factor is implicitly part of the group dynamics. This aspect become evident in **Cesare Pietroiusti's** public action, when an unexpected far right-wing crew responds animatedly to the artist's provocation of singing two old fascist songs. The reaction of the group has such an overwhelming power that Pietroiusti diverts his initial intention - to sing until he loses his voice - and decides that the performance is accomplished (*Pensiero Unico*, 2003).

With the same intensity, the dense cloud of spinning bottles made by **Johannes Vogl** (*Cloud*, 2008) seems to be a sort of romantic tribute to the street demonstrators of the first of May in Berlin-Kreuzberg and to the violent moment of coming together against a 'common enemy'. The presence of objects evokes the image of the absent bodies and remains as the leftovers of a powerful collective gesture. Overcoming the notion of 'absence' seems to be the only way to watch at a performance of the San Dance Company; a company formed by people who signed individual contracts with **San Keller** and agreed on dancing to a chosen piece of music, wherever they are, for the rest of their life (*Until the Last Dance*, 2006). This sense of belonging is nothing else but a constant act of imagination that the artist demands both to the company's members and to the audience. In a different way, the audio work by **Roman Ondák** calls for the participation of the audience in a 'sign of solidarity' that paradoxically does not happen through the usual communal and choreographed moment of silence but by keeping on performing whatever activity everyone is busy with at that moment (*Announcement*, 2002).

The dinner cooked by **Pablo Chiereghin** (*Prendete e Mangiatene Tutti / Take and Eat it*, 2010), uses the religious formula - that continues with the words "this is my Body" - so as to invite the audience to enjoy a dinner composed by a particularly nourishing soup, bread and red wine. The imaginative gesture of sharing, therefore goes beyond the ritual, its movements and its poses to mix up and blur with everyday life. **Wendelin Pressl's** *Solaris* (2006), made up with a disco ball, DIA-projectors and floating images of airplanes, represents an imaginary

micro-cosmos crossed by travellers routes; at the same time the disco-like atmosphere opens to the **Tisch Mit Netz**'s table tennis (**Ringerl**). The performative potential of conviviality produces a space for participation where individual reaction and improvisation opens to unpredictable outcomes.