

EL BALANDRE



Welcome to a dance-piece of the NOW.

Somewhere between a concert and a hectic visual compilation of short stories, Flemish choreographer Jan Martens has defined *Rule of Three* as an attempt to choreograph building upon a highly conditioning feature of our present reality: the way in which we receive information. Think of your Facebook wall or your Twitter account and you will get the picture: We have grown accustomed to being fed an overload of disconnected, unsorted pieces of input that follow one another in an almost continuous stream.

When watching the non-related succession of shorter and longer scenes (where a solo on drums is followed by the projection of a short text, then by a repetitive, jumpy movement sequence danced by the three dancers in a triangular formation paralleled by a bigger, illuminated, white triangle on the floor, etc.) one realises – I realised – soon enough that the senses got used quickly to the overall rhythm. One – I – actually felt even comfortable with it after a couple of changes, accustomed as we are – I am – to being fed images, ads, posts and podcasts at a similar rate and on a daily basis.

The analogue and digital drums, combined with found sounds and manipulated samples by musician NAH give the performance and the repetitive movements of Martens choreography the power and audiovisual interest they need to bind the audience to the developments of every scene. Some particularly compelling movement fragments bring the whole experiment to another level – the solo of dancer Courtney Robinson, new to Martens company, in particular. In it, she faces

the audience in the centre, backstage. While she approaches the front with movements that hold it between slow-motion nightclub dancing and robotic popping, she stretches her facial expression to the limit, opening her mouth and eyes, dehumanizing her whole being and still creating an effect of beautiful unease.

Her programmatic coldness, this distance between formal expression and showing of personal experience is common to the three performers and link to previous work of Jan Martens as well – for those who saw it, think of “The Dog days are Over”. This principle reveals a point to be made; it shows that the physical research and execution is at the service of something other than the empathic transmission of the dancers’ experience. In *Rule of Three* the combination of dance, music, light, and text is at service of a global audiovisual effect; abstract yet very well defined in its aesthetic agenda.

At the same time, with this expressive aim for neutrality Martens also avoids a moral judgement: The audience is confronted with the fact that this is how we receive and absorb inputs, but Martens does not show bias upon the fact. It just is, and seeing it becomes paradoxically both frightening and reassuring. In Martens words: “This work is an untamed meditation, built on contrasts: between explosion and stillness, precision and intuition, heart and reason”.

In some scenes the development of music and movement by means of slowly varying themes remind of the work Anna Teresa de Keersmaecker did on music of Steve Reich – for example in *Rain*, where a group of ten dancers visually hypnotise the audience by dancing on his *Music for 18 Musicians*. But Martens, in a tendency that is also very much in tune with a certain performative trend of the now, connects the result of his exploration to a clear political/socially recognizable theme.

Rule of three is a mild slap in the face of our perceptive habits. It awakens a crude reflection on the impossibility to narrate the present. To enforce this idea the last projected text of Lydia Davis, known for her short, short stories (sometimes as long as a sentence) sums it up best. More or less, she says: As the world grows in complexity together with us growing old, any attempt to write about it seems silly, until it even seems silly to write at all.

And yet, we write.

Jordi Ribot Thunnissen

Seen at the [Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam](#) on October 25th 2017