

About a Silent Piano and the Violinist on the Roof. L'Om Dada – a Survivance throughout a Century

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Abstract: Dada has marked a radical shift in what our idea of harmony and consonance told us how to make sense of art. No longer functional in a traditional, mimetic dimension, the art of the avant-garde does not seek to gratify and reassure the viewer, but involves him actively as it constantly defamiliarizes its objects. Our paper analyzes Gigi Căciuleanu's performance *l'Om DAdA* in conjunction to the movements of contemporary art under the continuous influence and guidance of the early Dada principles and strategies. We thus observe how the narrative of the performance builds on the fractures and discontinuities of space, history, movement in a dialogue that arches over a century with the Dada artistic phenomenon and mindset. Căciuleanu's choreographic theatre performs a mapping of our Real revisiting Dada's answer to a world already dislocated by the historical events of the 20th century. Taking Tristan Tzara's text *L'homme approximatif*, Gigi Căciuleanu takes it apart and puts it back together in a discontinuous montage which reflects on the dislocation of our own world.

Keywords: Gigi Căciuleanu, Dada, dialectics at a standstill, avant-garde, dissonance, montage, fragmentation, defamiliarization.

A space for the Dada man

*If a violinist plays in the woods and there's no one there to hear him,
does he really make a sound?*

When you visit *Plight*, Joseph Beuys' installation created in 1985 for the Anthony d'Offay gallery in London and then replicated for Centre Pompidou, you unexpectedly come across a secluded space specially designed so that it

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almost instantly suspends any surrounding noise, any *outside* as you enter it. In order to engage in the dialogue it provokes, you have to be inside, contained within. The space of this work extracts itself from that of the museum and the surrounding to-and-fro of the visitors. To get here you have to bend over and pass through a low entrance passage framed by bales of felt just to get into a room whose walls and ceiling are covered with a double range of the same grey felt rolls. Sounds outside become a mere quiet murmur. A sterile enveloping sanctuary where the visitor feels contained in a warm space, protected, but also isolated, cut off from the rest of the world. In the centre there is a closed black grand piano on top of which lie a blackboard and a thermometer. The presence of a piano in this sound absorbing felt insulated space is a *symptom*², an incongruous presence that signals a breach at the very core of its narrative. This work which opposes silence (inside) to sound (outside) has trapped within, at its very core, an instrument whose only purpose is to create sound, and yet in doing so has reduced it to silence. Therefore, a piano both protected and rendered useless, which by this very ambivalent juxtaposition is defamiliarized, is extracted from an automated perception. The thermometer placed on top of it indicates slight variations of temperature generated by the presence of the visitors. As felt insulates the space and absorbs any sound, it also creates an ambivalent sense of suffocation, the room having this propensity of both protecting and constraining the visitor just as it does to the sound of the instrument, a containment which infuses the atmosphere with a sense of claustrophobic menace but also of promise.

In the new type of dialogue the installation initiates, the art of the *avant-garde* no longer retains a position or a function which reassures the viewer, which builds stable and safe environments and spaces where the viewers always know their stand, their place and their role. This art embodies a new mentality where its function ceases to be traditional and mimetic and thus it forces the viewer to renounce a prefabricated, institutionally regulated perception in favour of a perception that is always involved creatively. In the space of a museum, agitated with people coming and going against the background of a continuous noise created by this

² Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Paris, Minuit, 2002; Aby Warburg, "La Naissance de Vénus" et "Le Printemps" de Sandro Boticelli. *Étude des représentations de l'antiquité dans la première Renaissance italienne* (1893), traduit de l'allemand par Laure Cahen-Maurel, Paris, Éditions Allia, 2007.

circulation, the entrance in this completely isolated room is done through an opening, an interstice, as if it were a sort of birth inside, not outside, a birth from the world, out of the world instead of into the world.

One has to bear in mind such an image when entering the world sketched by choreographer Gigi Căciuleanu. Space changes as it is constantly fractured by interstices and discontinuities in the visible (space, movement) and the audible (language, music, sound). Gigi Căciuleanu believes in a broader idea of dance which encompasses the real, and surpasses the visible rendered by movement. In his view dance begins the moment the body is animated by movements that no longer belong to the body. In Aby Warburg's terms such a moment represents a *symptom*, the place of a crisis in the very space of art, of its dynamics, form and figure. It is in fact what the art historian and anthropologist Aby Warburg calls *Nachleben*, a temporal over determination of images and their narrative, of history therefore, which coagulates into various forms of manifestation as a (surviving) symptom. The concept of *Nachleben*³, which in Warburg's research superposes recurring images of the past (antiquity) to those of the Western modern world, stands against any simplification of history and artificially partitioning of history into easy to use, homogenous periodizations. In its endeavour it remains ever so actual and functional in what our approach to art (in its various and intercutting forms and ramifications) should be. *Nachleben* infuses art history and, in doing so, it disorients its engaging multiple vectors simultaneously⁴. But in disorienting it, it also complexifies it as it expands the field of its manifestations, of its approaches, of its temporal models, in relation to a given historical context. The past becomes anachronic and thus history

³ See Aby Warburg, *Le Rituel du Serpent. Récit d'un voyage en pays pueblo* (1923), traduit de l'allemand par Sibylle Muller, Paris, Macula, 2003.

⁴ For Aby Warburg the question of tradition is complex because it brings together two apparently opposed dimensions: the historical and the anachronic. Each period is woven out of its own node of moments of the past, anachronisms, moments of the present and propensities towards the future: "La survivance selon Warburg ne nous offre aucune possibilité de simplifier l'histoire: elle impose une désorientation redoutable pour toute velléité de périodisation. Elle est une notion transversale à tout découpage chronologique. Elle décrit un *autre temps*. Elle désoriente donc l'histoire, l'ouvre, la complexifie. Pour tout dire, elle *l'anachronise* [...] Ce sont les choses mortes depuis longtemps, en effet, qui hantent le plus efficacement - le plus dangereusement - notre mémoire [...] La survivance, donc, *ouvre l'histoire* [...] *complexifie l'histoire*: elle libère une sorte de 'marge d'indétermination' dans la corrélation historique des phénomènes." (Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, work cited, p. 85).

becomes anachronic.⁵ The approximate man conceived by Gigi Căciuleanu in his performance l'Om DAdA⁶ is therefore an anachronism. What could be more disoriented than the actual man, Gigi Căciuleanu asks rhetorically, before further developing on the idea that even though it has been one hundred years since the launching of the Dada movement, our lives are caught in a process of continuous fragmentation more than ever before. The more information we have access to (we are assaulted with) the less informed we are. That is the underlying idea of l'Om DAdA. By acting out a (neo)dada scenario, the two characters of the choreographic play staged by Gigi Căciuleanu enter a dialogue with the Dada mindset across a century. The play does not replicate what Dada meant or looked like a century ago, but merely dwells on the Dada occurrences (survivances) erupting like a continuously simmering active volcano. If Dada was a reaction one hundred years ago against the violence and absurdity of that time, its lesson still speaks to us today, when besides the increased violence and absurdity of our own times we are constantly assaulted by too much information which we no longer have the time and the skills to sort out effectively. Too much information kills information, Gigi Căciuleanu explains in an interview,⁷ but if you cut it into smaller pieces, if you disassemble it, you will find it easier to communicate the real. Therefore the Dada gesture of cutting the paper into small pieces and rearranging them in a different narrative is in fact a process of slowing down, slowing ourselves down and slowing information down, cutting it into small pieces and pasting them together so that they convey a better approximation of who we are and what we believe when we can no longer hide behind the rhetoric of language, be it the language of politics, media or history. A gesture which is as actual and necessary today as it was a century ago. "The 'approximate man' - nothing is more approximate than

⁵ Analysing Renaissance as an *impure time* Warburg understands that its source (Classical Antiquity) is in its turn impure. Therefore origin itself constitutes an impure temporality through hybridization and sedimentation and anachronism is at work within the very mechanism of historical evolution. Opening a breach in the usual models of evolution, *survivance* unveils paradoxes, nonlinear modifications which anachronize the future thus acting as a "formative force for the emergence of styles." (See Aby Warburg, "*La Naissance de Vénus*" et "*Le Printemps*" de Sandro Boticelli. *Étude des représentations de l'antiquité dans la première Renaissance italienne*, work cited, p. 49).

⁶ A performance by choreographer Gigi Căciuleanu (direction, choreography, costumes, space concept and music) based on the poem *L'homme approximatif* by Tristan Tzara, translated by Ion Pop, starring Gigi Căciuleanu and Lari Georgescu, which premiered at the National Theatre of Bucharest on March 11, 2016.

⁷ <http://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/oamenii-dada-gigi-caciuleanu-lari-georgescu/index.html>

the human being! - is in fact, in the performance, a character as non-approximate as possible, who is demanded precision, who is required to be a clown, an actor and a dancer. In one word the DanceActor. I hope for it to be first and foremost a performance of our times."⁸

Could we see l'Om DAdA also as a manifesto for the condition of art today, and in particular, in this case, because we are talking about a choreographer, for the condition of dance as what the art of movement should encompass today? 'I try to integrate so many levels of reading in what I do, and not necessarily in a programmatic, fully controlled awareness,' Gigi Căciuleanu explains in a TV interview. He confesses to finding ballet today as something outdated in the sense of it being 'very exterior', very far: "This is not enough for me. This art which is most corporeal, most immediate, most tactile has turned into a sort of representation from afar and that bothers me... I turn ballet dancers into actors as often as I get the chance, I do not reduce them to being actors, I just add to them an extra dimension. It is this multidimensionality which is of extreme interest to me."⁹

The Dada artists created a distinct universe in which the world outside was restructured, rearranged, dismembered and reassembled in an apparently playful but in fact very serious manner and also in an apparently serious but in fact very playful manner.¹⁰ Speaking about dance Gigi Căciuleanu puts it in these very terms: every performance has to be a matter of life and death, every performance is at the same time the first and the last performance, but then he admits to never taking himself very seriously. To him dance has its own will, its own reasoning while the artist has no choice but to follow it. He admits to feeling the lack of language, of the spoken word in dance. The choreographic theatre of Gigi Căciuleanu encompasses apparently distinct fields into a unique, playful, but deeply significant pluridimensional form of art where dance, language, art, music, architecture intermingle into a form of poetry in movement which is ever inquiring, ever restless, which continuously negotiates the Real and our relation with it.

⁸ <http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/20626/Comunicat-de-presa/.html>

⁹ <http://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/oamenii-dada-gigi-caciuleanu-lari-giorgescu/index.html>

¹⁰ "Dada is our intensity... Dada is life with neither bedroom slippers nor parallels... We are circus ringmasters and we can be found whistling amongst the winds of fairgrounds... And while we put on a show of being facile we are actually searching for the central essence of things, and are pleased if we can hide it... DADA is neither madness, nor wisdom, nor irony... art isn't serious, I assure you..." (Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries*, translated by Barbara Wright, Richmond, Surrey, Oneworld Classics, 2011, pp. 1-2).

l'Om DAdA performs a de-theatricalisation of movement to abstraction. Gigi Căciuleanu sees in this de-theatricalisation of movement dance and mathematics but most and foremost beauty and genius. This need to unburden not only form but also meaning from protocols, to unload the formalization, the standardization and unnecessary debris that builds up in interpretation is not something new: "La poésie est-elle nécessaire? Je sais que ceux qui crient le plus fort contre elle, lui destinent sans le savoir et lui préparent une perfection confortable; – ils nomment cela futur hygiénique. [...] Faut-il ne plus croire aux mots? Depuis quand expriment-ils le contraire de ce que l'organe qui les émet, pense et veut? Le grand secret est là: La pensée se fait dans la bouche."¹¹ To Gigi Căciuleanu thinking occurs and is permanently negotiated throughout a continuous dialogue with not only art, but also the world around us. Recounting the first time he saw a Kandinsky painting in his childhood, he recalled the experience being like seeing what was going on inside him when dancing. It was then, he says, that he realized he could express himself freely. If anything his performances speak of the boundlessness of our universe, of the artificiality of labeling things and limiting them to specific areas, fields, functions and categories. There are no limits and no rigid categories anywhere near his performances. Nothing remains distant and far in his performances. The Dada gesture one hundred years ago of cutting text into separate words and rearranging them by clipping them back together could not be more necessary, more actual and less random and meaningless. It is in a way a manner of making sense of the Real, it is, also, a more honest, immediate and authentic way of perceiving and communicating a reality which is neither final nor stable,¹² but - just like the water in Aivazovsky's paintings which Gigi Căciuleanu refers to when talking about dance - always in motion. To him the quest is to render the movement of unsettled waves without fixing it, without freezing it, while what you see in the painting changes continuously depending on where you stand, how close or how far you are from it. Gigi Căciuleanu dances and employs in his performances this difference. "Today, he explains, we can no longer keep a distance, this is what makes theatre alive. It breaks the mirror, it breaks the screen... and the direct contact of meat with meat, of eyes with eyes, of heart with heart, of madness with madness and of intelligence with

¹¹ Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres Complètes I*, Paris, Editions Flammarion, 1975, p. 379.

¹² "The Dadaist suffers... from the dissonances [of his age] to the point of self-disintegration" (Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (1927), trans. Ann Raimés, New York, Viking Press, 1974, p. 66).

intelligence functions in an immediate manner...’ But in this process of dislocation and fragmentation of the Real, what happens is - just like in the case of the silent piano in the felt room - a defamiliarization which extracts us, even forces us out of a clichéd perception. “I took *L’Homme approximatif*, Tristan Tzara’s text which is extremely poetical, not at all absurd, very beautiful, non fragmented, rich, full of meanings, very actual even after one hundred years. ‘The approximate man’ is in fact the archetype of a very exact man, which is the actor and the dancer.”¹³

So how does the audience, how does the viewer react to this defamiliarization they are subjected to when they enter this space cut into pieces and put back together in a very rich and demanding manner by Gigi Căciuleanu? How does the museum visitor react to the presence of the closed piano? Or could it be that we are not asking the question correctly? Could it be that we are still trained to use vectors only in certain ways? Maybe the question should rather be, what happens in this meeting. What does this meeting do to each of the sides involved and what happens in this interaction? How does the visitor entering the secluded space of the piano alter this space, how does it affect the piano, how does this strange defamiliarized object alter the viewer? Gigi Căciuleanu is preoccupied in his choreographies by the idea of meeting, by the presence of space in these meetings, how, when two bodies meet, the space between them becomes smaller but all the while the spaces behind each get bigger: “It is so that any meeting, so simple as it may be, produces a tear, a rupture of space which can be (and is) quite dramatic... space thus changes its quality, its colour, its smell, its identity.”¹⁴ The task of any performance (and that has been the underlying idea and scope of *avant-garde* in general) is to surprise the viewer in the sense of its unpredictability. The language of the silent piano comes each time as a surprise. Its contact with the visitor establishes a relation based on their presence, not on the predictable. While the piano remains silent the thermometer on top of it will *measure* the changes of space and atmosphere in the presence of the other. Therefore it might be safe to say that it is not the performance that enters the world of the viewer and it is not the viewer that just enters the space of an already established performance. Although the performance is thought out in the slightest detail, this meeting is a different one each time as it entails

¹³ <http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/20626/Comunicat-de-presa/.html>

¹⁴ *Classic is fantastic* - Gigi Căciuleanu Romanian Dance Company, exemplifying fragments with comments from *FabriKa* at the Romanian Athenaeum, April 19, 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYqlBIVEckU>

constantly moving narratives, times and spaces: "The spaces which *dance* around the dancers dance together with them, just as Earth, when it revolves it does that with its entire atmosphere. When I am dancing, all these spaces come along with me all over the place and at all times I am being caught between this crumbling, disintegration of space."¹⁵

l'Om *DAdA* is in its author's view an existential and philosophical epic of human nature, that is of man in general. In a gesture echoing the process of creation (but at same time being also a disintegration of that very gesture, its reiteration in reverse), the performance begins with the fragmentation and decomposition of sounds and words, slowly moving to the fragmentation of sentences and then of ideas. But this process of fragmentation is, in a double functionality, also a process of recomposition, although one that refuses to be caught and frozen in a (final) form. In his constant preoccupation for the role and nature of history of art Georges Didi-Huberman considers that its approach should not be philological but philosophical, in the sense that art should not be simple analysis and should not be integrated to a discourse which already has all the categories ready and prepared to assimilate, label and exemplify it. Art, in the view of the French theorist,¹⁶ must always question its discourse, must disassemble and reassemble its language removing it from its inertial privileged space, extracting it from the comfort rendered by the process of regularizing and conforming to a certain type of reusable discourse the elements it contains. The very difficult task of art must therefore consider constantly reinventing its own language, its own fluid and individual categories which change their space and temporality. But from that moment on, art no longer protects either the viewer or its author.

An Approximate Story – The Eye of the Storm, the Eye of History

*Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin*

In an episode from the American television series *Northern Exposure*, a fairly notorious violinist is asked by the typical American magnate to play for him a rare Guarnieri violin that he was intending to buy as a sure

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See Georges Didi-Huberman, *Devant le temps. Histoire de l'art et anachronisme des images*, Paris, Minuit, 2000.

investment over time. The violinist is smitten by the magic sound of this instrument to such an extent that he abandons his career as concert violinist and becomes obsessed with the perfect, unique sound of this instrument that makes music pour out of his fingers in a way he had never experienced before. His devastation at the thought that he cannot afford buying this violin from the American capitalist is only worsened by the thought that the latter keeps that violin locked up in a safe at all times, unwilling to understand that an instrument like that needs to be played, needs to be voiced and nurtured. He tries to steal the violin but his plan fails, he becomes a fugitive but is nevertheless trapped in a paralyzing inability to leave town, playing his violin - which in a surprising gesture the magnate has ended up allowing him access to - at night in the woods. He ends up living in a cave, steals what food he can find around people's homes and is all this time trapped like an insect in the web the violin has woven around him.

Such a behaviour could seem at least far-fetched and eccentric, or if we want to read it in a different key, a highly unlikely scenario that could only lead to one or two conclusions: it is either for the sake of the comedy and absurdity of the situation, or it is that this artist, this violinist character is actually and undoubtedly mad. No one in their sanity would react like that to... art, would they? Or could it be that we might be wrong again asking this question? Simplifying, dismissing a highly relevant and serious matter just because it is not tackled in an adequate legitimizing academic environment? Should the big questions revolving around art be asked properly only in the spaces we regard as rightfully allocated for that? And if, ignoring the rhetorical character of this question, we feel that the answer should evoke arguments such as academism and seriousness and no joking around such big and important issues, where does that leave us when we see a completely useless silent piano in a room, a mass-produced urinal presented as a fountain in a museum, a painting which is a merely incomprehensible and random splash of colours, the making of a poem out of random words pasted together, or even a play in which theatre and choreography are mixed with at times incomprehensible gibberish talk jumping from the recurring image of sounding bells - mid-word, mid-sentence, mid-phrase - to silly childhood games and rhymes in associations that function just like a dissonant chord would in music. And yet, there is so much music and poetry and intensity in the narrative it tells. If anything, the Dada phenomenon has marked a radical shift in what our notion of harmony and sense of consonance told us how to make sense of art. Just like Wagner's famous

Tristan chord,¹⁷ this new approach to art and its practice created a rather shocking and uncomfortable infamous harmony which no longer resolves dissonances in a composition to consonances as one would expect, - as the audience has been accustomed to. Quite the contrary, harmony is always questioned, postponed, reconsidered, disassembled, and reassembled, so that, in this restless process of reassembling, dissonances constantly resolve to other dissonances. It does not happen out of a whim, for the sake of difference or contradiction, but it rather seeks to reflect the approximateness, impreciseness, uncertainty of that which we call Real and even more of how we perceive ourselves and our place in this Real and in relation to it. The artist thus builds tensions looking for answers and exploring possibilities outside the reassuring established set of rules and practices. These tensions actually match or mirror the unique unrepeatable narrative of man in his relation with the Real, with time and space, or, in Gigi Căciuleanu's words the approximate condition of man thrown in the world. Just as such is the seclusion of the violinist in *Northern Exposure*, who is confronted with his approximate condition. Having fallen from Ed's roof, violinist Cal Ingraham is brought to the village doctor. In the conversation between Ed, the doctor, and the violinist, the latter comes to verbalize his artistic dilemma/crisis:

You were playing the violin on Ed's roof?/ Has marvelous acoustics. It's the surrounding hills/.../ Are you depressed, Cal?/ Well, to be frank, I can't really explain what's happening to me, Ed. I can't seem to leave town. It's quite puzzling, actually./ I wonder if you're lonely?/ Yes, yes, you may be onto something there, Ed. Interesting. I've never been a social animal, Ed. Even as a lad, I was quite accustomed to long periods of solitude, but this is different. Lonely, yes, yes, that's getting close... Well, I suppose what it comes down to is this. If a violinist plays in the woods and there's no one there to hear him, does he really make a sound?/ What do you mean?/ Playing for the amusement of voles and marmots, just isn't the same as playing for people. Even in the dark,

¹⁷ In music theory the concept *nonfunctional* describes a chord that cannot be analyzed in a way that makes sense with tonal harmony, i.e., it does not "function" in a tonal way. The Tristan chord from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) is the quintessential nonfunctional chord, with many other examples proliferating throughout the posttonal era of music which reached its full flowering in the early twentieth century with the expressionistic works of Richard Strauss and Arnold Schoenberg. The music of Claude Debussy is also considered to be posttonal as is much of the art music that continued to be written throughout the twentieth century. (Cf. Matthew Hoch, *A Dictionary for the Modern Singer. Dictionaries for the Modern Musician*, Lanham, Maryland, Published by Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

from the rooftop, even though I can't see who's listening, there's something about a live performance, knowing someone's out there, just one person, perhaps, who's touched by your music.¹⁸

In their seemingly autistic, retaliating, or disruptive behaviour, the avant-garde artists have stepped maybe more than ever into the space of the audience, of the viewer, of the other who, throughout the centuries, in the traditional functionality and concept of art have had a well-delimited allotted space and role outside, in the distance. The Dada artist wants to be heard, wants to reach people in an immediate, unmediated way, wants to make sure that his art triggers a reaction, an involvement from the other. And if that means he needs to climb on roofs and take his art from the concert hall into the woods that is what he will do. Art needs to be a constantly live performance and it can only be so if there is an other it can reach to and it can touch not in a distant, secured, sterilized way, but in a direct, primary and fully engaging contact. Art is for Gigi Căciuleanu an encounter that is no different than our encounters in our everyday life. His art speaks of this 'machinery of duets' which shapes us, our thoughts and actions through all the various adventures we engage upon. Loneliness, he explains, is also a duet performed in the absence of the other: "when someone is alone he lacks someone besides him".

So did the Dada artist feel alone? And in the duet of the visitor with the silent piano were there any questions asked about the meaning of solitude and how art could answer to that? In *Entrance to a Living Organism*, a lecture he gave during Documenta 6¹⁹, Joseph Beuys emphasized in relation to the complexity and experimental nature of one work of Marcel Duchamp, that one must put the question quite differently. 'That is the question of the critical situation of art itself. It is not enough that one turns directly to a picture. One has to allow new experiments and subsequently expand the concepts for the work.'²⁰

The art of the avant-garde requires a different kind of involvement from the viewer, it does not allow its recipient to remain remote and

¹⁸ *Northern Exposure*, created by Joshua Brand, John Falsey (1990-1995), Season 6, Episode 13.

¹⁹ Documenta is an exhibition of modern and contemporary art organized every five years in Kassel, Germany. Joseph Beuys' lecture *Eintritt in ein Lebenswesen* was delivered during the sixth edition on August 6, 1977.

²⁰ Antje von Graevenitz, "Breaking the Silence. Joseph Beuys on his 'Challenger,' Marcel Duchamp" (1995) in *Joseph Beuys. The Reader*, Edited and translated by Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely with a Foreword by Arthur C. Danto, London, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007, p. 29.

secluded in a safely delimited environment. The viewer's relation with art becomes his own personal and unrepeatable quest. The violinist who cannot leave town is in a way comparable to the violin which is locked in a safe. A securing space which is also suffocating, unnatural for the purpose of the instrument, both presenting a danger, as it questions its very identity as sound-producing and art-producing instrument (with other questions arising here like how is this art produced?), but also as a promise, the instrument pertaining to a space that reconsiders the very purpose and functionality of the object. For the violinist, it also contains the promise of a different music which is always in the future, an always postponed promise which comes with the silenced sound of the instrument. This is how Joseph Beuys explains an earlier installation of a piano wrapped in felt, called *Infiltration for piano*: "everything in the scale in the possibilities is involved from noise to concept; the sound of the piano is trapped. The piano is an instrument to produce sound, when not in use is silent but still has sound potential. When no sound is possible the piano is condemned to silence. [...] if we remain silent [...] we fail to make the next evolution step. Such an object is intended as a stimulus for discussion and in no way is to be taken as an aesthetic product; it is vital that human kind should slowly learn to speak. Everything must be expressed, negatives even those beyond language."²¹

According to French philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman²² the purpose of art is to turn the mutism history triggers in us into a language which fights against the alphabetism of images regarded as stereotypes. An image that questions and challenges pre-established categories will impose a reformulation of language and an essential modification in the conceptual and visual language so that it does not function on the basis of generalities and likeliness of occurrence. This language should primarily deal with that which is unique, unrepeatable, the *symptom*, the deviant and that which is not adequate, which escapes any attempt of generalization and uniformisation. Yet, in order to do that, the viewer must take a stand. Taking a stand is, as Didi-Huberman explains it, an anarchic gesture, one that upsets, even overthrows existing order and structures. It requires a permanent mobility, the responsibility of being continuously engaged in a dynamics of drawing closer and distancing

²¹ Joseph Beuys, "Infiltration homogen für Konzertflügel" (*Infiltration for Piano*), Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1966.

²² Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images malgré tout*, Paris, Minuit, 2003.

oneself. To Brecht, the subject of art is the disorder of the world; there is no world which is not disorder, he says.²³

In dealing with this disorder of the world, Dada makes, in its turn, a montage which does not try to adjust or correct the world, to uniformize it into a coherent narrative, but rather takes a stand, reassembling, re-disposing in a disorderly manner an already disorderly world. In his performance, Gigi Căciuleanu places as much emphasis on unbalance, lack of stability, as he does on balance. 'Things are born out of certain necessities and I only set them free,' he explains.²⁴ He therefore works by decomposition and recomposition of movement, with movement and non-movement where the stillness - which does not function as a pose - freezes time, is a suspended moment like a dialectical image – *dialectics at a standstill*²⁵ – in which history and thus time is disassembled and reassembled at the same time. Therefore, this is an image which fills a place that is never fixated. These dance movements are for Gigi Căciuleanu an equivalent for time, for privileged moments. The dance movements he employs pose an extra degree of difficulty because they are out of an axis: "In school we learn to stay in an axis, to stay in balance... I ask disbalances from the dancers... the way the body organizes itself in movement, while falling is a moment of dance... a dancer in front of an obstacle, of danger, resorts to this necessity to survive... It is said that dance is the art of life, I say it is the art of survival."²⁶ *l'Om DAdA* casts its characters in powerful and contrasting states, as what matters for the choreographer is not to work with poses but with situations, the situation between two persons, the void, the empty space(s) that are created between two persons who face each other or turn their back to one another or place themselves to different angles. There is an entire psychology of angles the choreographer is preoccupied with. The performance begins with an empty space containing a rocking chair and a wooden bench. The floor is marked by a few intersecting lines in different angles and a circle, none of which are traced with mathematical precision. The basic elements of geometry that lie at the basis of any representation of figure

²³ Bertolt Brecht, *Journal de travail*, 1938-1955, Paris, L'Arche, 1997.

²⁴ "Dansul e ca un drog. Dansul e ca metafora. Poezie", Gigi Căciuleanu is interviewed by Magdalena Popa Buluc for *Cotidianul*, September 27, 2011 (<http://www.cotidianul.ro/-dansul-e-ca-un-drog-dansul-e-ca-metafora-poezie-159190/>).

²⁵ See Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIXe siècle. Le livre des passages (1927-1940)*, éd. R. Tiedemann, trad. fr. J. Lacoste, Paris, Le Cerf, 1993, p. 491.

²⁶ "Neputința de a fi altfel: dacă mergi contra naturii tale strici tot" interview by Aura Poenar, June 2014 (<http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/18275/Aura-Poenar-Gigi-Caciuleanu/.html>).

or space are here employed in a deconstructing fragmentation. Sound creeps in, the noise of traffic, the busy noise of the to-and-fro of everyday life and then, superposing, very loud sounding church bells, somehow intrusive in their loudness that seems to infiltrate more and more in the room. If we have no difficulty in accepting the sound, the function, the effect in absence of the instrument that produces it, why is it that we suddenly feel confused when we reverse this vector, when we bring forth the instrument but strip it of its expected *raison d'être*, silence it in what tradition and experience has taught us to expect from it? *l'Om DAdA* continuously reverses this vector, it assembles its narrative dwelling on the space between words, between letters, between the two characters that enter the stage from different points, at different moments, each occupying a different place and a different narrative in this abstract geometrical deconstructed space. The viewer is thus contained in this approximation of space, of the human being, of its destiny/destinies, of "man randomly thrown in the world... caught in the spider web of planetary incertitudes... of geography... of geographies... of history... of histories..."²⁷

What could be more approximate than that, the choreographer asks; "maybe just movement-movements... gesture-gestures, the fibres of the body... the untraceable changes in the face muscles... clouds overlapping in their passage the screen of existence could extract man from approximation, try and decipher his uncertain and fragile being... but what good is that?... why not leave him the privilege to dance away his life with his uncertainty... uncertainties..."²⁸ The fragmentation of space through the movements and gestures of the characters is echoed by the fragmentation of words into sounds. The disassembling and reassembling of language (and thus beliefs, ideas, histories), the connections, dialogue and superposition between syllables and words happen as fulgurances. Both language and movement are subjected to a permanent dynamics in which they are taken apart and put back together in infinite combinations. The dialogue and relation between the two characters is continually edited into a fragmented montage permanently reassembling space, time and narratives. Relations become more sinuous, more sophisticated, you don't reach someone by going right up to them, but by employing all kinds of tactics and strategies of movements which are quite diabolical, Gigi Căciuleanu explains, because

²⁷ Gigi Căciuleanu during *l'Om DAdA* press conference,
<http://agenda.liternet.ro/articol/20626/Comunicat-de-presa/html>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

they are very orchestrated in the sense that each dancer has to execute his movement without making a mistake. In a sense it is like in the duet of two acrobats, hazard and madness but also structure and exact mathematical calculations attached to each movement.²⁹ Behind every movement there is always a mind factory, even the more so as the instrument of the dancer is his own body. 'Ever since I started dancing I have felt that each day I'm starting from scratch again. In dance, especially, nothing you have done before matters' the choreographer explains in an interview.³⁰ In l'Om DAdA the movements of the two characters (or it could even be just a dialogue between different hypostases, different states of mind of the same person over time), of their bodies and arms fragment the space around themselves constantly. It's as if we were witnessing each moment precisely the instant when life is starting from scratch again. In the dance conceived by Gigi Căciuleanu life is a continuous interaction between movement, space and time as if life itself were possible only as a dialectical image, constantly questioning, searching, reconfiguring itself. Dance is to the choreographer a sort of science of capturing the universe (but in what manner, if not only through fulgurances?) and giving it to others. It would be reasonable to say dance in this view is what Walter Benjamin calls *Dialektik im Stillstand*, as in dance time contracts or expands, one second can comprise a century while another second can expand itself to the point of total lack of motion. These are the moments Gigi Căciuleanu feels that need to be captured in dance, this "relation between time and space, speed through movement and movement through speed... when you have found the speed you go to the right space..."³¹ In this interaction with space there is an entire space machinery involved. The dancer does not employ only his body in dance but everything that is in the vicinity of his body, and the spaces he fractures through movement change continuously their size and shape; these spaces have their own identities which dance altogether, the choreographer explains: "Movements remain very fluid; this fluidity tries to follow in the idea of encounters and dis-encounters between people; we enter the space of the other, we leave it, it is as if a door opens; space is divided so that the other can get in and get out..."³²

²⁹ *Classic is fantastic*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYqlBIVEckU>

³⁰ Gigi Căciuleanu interviewed by Silvia Kerim, 'Lumea românească', *Formula AS*, No.720, 2006.

³¹ <http://www.cotidianul.ro/dansul-e-ca-un-drog-dansul-e-ca-metafora-poezie-159190/>

³² *Classic is fantastic*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYqlBIVEckU>

How and why we continue to be L'om Dada

rien n'est plus étranger à l'art que de prétendre faire quelque chose à partir de rien
(B. Brecht, *Journal de travail*)

Gigi Căciuleanu is a formidable philosopher and thinker. He has built an entire philosophy in his dance in which – he says – Hamlet's dilemma *to be or not to be* infuses every movement. His performance questions and negotiates man's relation with the universe, a universe which is in fact the infinite combinations between reality and nothing, movement and stillness, sound and absence of sound, or as Gigi Căciuleanu would put it, between *grammar and poetry, calculation and irrationality, lucidity and delirium, order and chaos, structure and madness*. Truth, he says, cannot be found in one of them, or in between the two, but only in both of them, as in his dance neither madness, nor structure can exist alone: "How many times, while interpreting a choreography, have I not felt the need to resort to a moment of madness in order to make its structure shatter in thousands of pieces..."³³ In *l'Om DAdA* the Real is reassembled through images, musical fragments, songs, nursery rhymes, hopscotch playing, etc. History is decanted by fulgurances, and in this language things are continually dislocated and temporarily reconfigured. Nothing remains fixated, resolved into form. There is a fluidity of history which goes on even after the performance ends. Gigi Căciuleanu employs fulgurances, areas/spaces of darkness and light, geometries and deconstruction of geometrical figures throughout the entire performance. Time, space, meaning of words are constantly renegotiated, re-questioned through montage and continuous juxtaposition of spaces which reconfigure also the relation with history/time these spaces pertain to. 'I did to Tzara's text what he did to others,' the choreographer explained, going on to develop on the idea that breaking the text into pieces he recomposed it but also stretched it again in time: "No performance resembles another, you always discover new things in each performance, even though it is extremely written, in the sense that its partition is very thoroughly detailed. It is like jazz, which is never the same, despite the fact that we play the same thing."³⁴ Coming back to things, reinterpreting the meaning of phrases, dissecting words and ideas and

³³ Gigi Căciuleanu, *Vânt, volume, vectori: eseu de cromo-analiză aplicată corpului în stare de dans*, traducere Anca Rotescu, București, Curtea Veche, 2008, p. 13.

³⁴ <http://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/oamenii-dada-gigi-caciuleanu-lari-giorgescu/index.html>

images is performed against the background of avoiding comfortable and securing areas in acting and dancing, because this is the only way in which you can reinvent yourself: “if you don’t love yourself too much you get bored and then you reinvent yourself constantly so that you can love yourself again.”³⁵

l’Om DAdA puts together and takes apart through montage the world of the man alone, thrown at random in the world, having no certainties as to the meaning of (his) life, and yet not dissolved by these insecurities: *quel est ce langage qui nous fouette nous sursautons dans la lumière/ nos nerfs sont des fouets entre les mains du temps/ et le doute vient avec une seule aile incolore/ se vissant se comprimant s’écrasant en nous.*³⁶ The difficulty of the montage of images it employs is to permanently put them in the perspective of the other, of an alterity. The difficulty of an image lies in the idea of making it relevant in terms of ‘we’ and not of ‘I’. Images coexist together in an intertwined manner, any image is a montage, an image doesn’t make sense by itself – as Godard said – therefore any image is manipulated just like words are, a manipulation which can be either positive or negative. We have to pay attention to the montage of an image as the sense it makes is dictated by its *phrasing*. Dada wishes to employ a language which does not lie, which saves the image/ language from cliché, from stock-phrase rhetoric: “*nous avons déplacé les notions et confondu leurs vêtements avec leurs noms/ aveugles sont les mots qui ne savent retrouver que leur place dès leur naissance/ leur rang grammatical dans l’universelle sécurité.*”³⁷ The lesson of Dada is that we write with everything on anything. In order to restore the force of images we need to learn to see images in relation to one another. According to Georges Didi-Huberman, just as we have to build phrases so that words can make sense, we need to build phrases for images, we need to phrase images so that they can make sense.³⁸ In other words we have to think images in montage. Dada was a reaction against the absurdity of war, of cruelty, of the negative manipulation of images and political discourse: “A hundred years ago, in the midst of World War I the Zürich Dadaists developed the strategy of mimetic exacerbation [...] they took the corrupt language of the european powers

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Tristan Tzara, *L’Homme approximatif*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Dans l’œil de Georges Didi-Huberman*, George Didi-Huberman is interviewed by Augustin Trapenard for France Culture (<https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/boomerang/boomerang-20-juin-2016>).

around them and played it back as a caustic nonsense."³⁹ But this reaction, this "revolt did not lead to destruction but, without giving precise directions, opened the way to the uncertain, 'Approximate Man.' Any attempt to order the world within a well established framework has led to disasters, therefore why not leave man the privilege of dancing his life with its uncertainties, in his 'dada' manner, as constructively as possible?"⁴⁰ Dada wanted spontaneity not because it looked or was better, but because they considered that everything that comes freely of ourselves without the filter of speculative ideas represents us. As Michel Foucault put it, history is made up of discontinuities. The answer of Dada to a world already dislocated by the historical events of the twentieth century is the dislocation of its narratives by dwelling on these very discontinuities: *les cloches sonnent sans raison et nous aussi/ nous partons avec les départs arrivons avec les arrivées/ partons avec les arrivées arrivons quand les autres partent.*

If Dada art tends to establish and dwell on chaos it is because in front of a world whose order has become unacceptable one had to learn the lessons of extreme disorder. Imagination, according to Didi-Huberman, has a moral, an ethical dimension as, contrary to what one would expect, it is not something personal, a personal fantasy, but a political faculty.⁴¹ The Dadaists imagine and superpose in a dialogical manner different points of view in order to imagine the lessons of disorder: *les yeux des fruits nous regardent attentivement/ et toutes nos actions sont contrôlées il n'y a rien de caché.* The role of art is not a comforting one, art is not redemptive as Didi-Huberman observes. It is a very fragile thing and the words and images we employ are in their turn very fragile. We live, according to the art historian, in a world which abuses words and images, in a world that is trying to reduce the power and poetry of images to clichés. The task of the artist is to seek beyond the cliché something that could be called an image⁴²: *je pense à la chaleur que tisse la parole/ autour de son noyau le rêve qu'on appelle nous.*

In l'Om DAdA words are recomposed, rediscovered through phrasing, the utterance becomes constitutive, doing and undoing the meaning of words, the course of memory, and words become incantatory. Gigi Căciuleanu recreates the world before the audience with each l'Om DAdA performance and all the way he also takes it apart, cutting it into pieces the way he cuts with the

³⁹ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, London, Verso Books, 2015, p. 91.

⁴⁰ <http://www.romanalibera.ro/cultura/cultura-urbana/gigi-caciuleanu-va-fi-omul-dada-406612>

⁴¹ <https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/boomerang/boomerang-20-juin-2016>

⁴² *Ibid.*

scissors the Manifest newspaper in the end. The world can only be genuinely caught in this montage, the performance is always different although it follows the 'script' all the way through. It is a fulgurance, having the fragility of a bubble, an experience that repeats itself with the same inexhaustible force and authenticity. The theatrical-musical-choreographic language goes beyond any clichés. 'Words are taken out of context, posed differently and then reality reinvents itself, which is so beautiful,' the choreographer explains during a press conference. Reinvention, he says, is the most difficult and beautiful thing that could happen to us, starting from scratch each time and approximating the world once again. Man is 'approximated' by poetry which, as the DADA founder believed, is the single state of immediate truth (*les cloches sonnent sans raison et nous aussi/ les soucis que nous portons avec nous/ qui sont nos vêtements intérieurs/ que nous mettons tous les matins/ que la nuit défait avec des mains de rêve*).

Choreographer Gigi Căciuleanu admitted to discovering new connections each time he plays in the performance, and most of all he said he discovered in amazement how close we all are to the Dadaist movement; most of the time without even being aware of it: "I think the audience will feel the same thing in the end... It is a performance about each and everyone and not an intellectual undertaking. We are all Dadaists, we defragment, we throw something of us on stage and in life."⁴³

In *Bad New Days*, theorist Hal Foster argues that normally we understand the underlying motives for the emergence of avant-garde movements as either related to the transgression of a given order or the legislation of a new one. But if - as is the case with Dada - *there are no laws anymore* (and this condition is far more common than we acknowledge, he says) then the question that arises is how should the avant-garde be defined: "Not heroic, this avant-garde will not pretend that it can break absolutely with the old order or found a new one; rather it will seek to trace fractures that already exist within the given order, to pressure them further, to activate them somehow. Neither *avant* nor rear, this *garde* will assume a position of immanent critique, and often it will adopt a posture of mimetic exacerbation in doing so. If any avant-garde is relevant to our time, it is this one."⁴⁴

To Gigi Căciuleanu, choreography is in its creative route between two points a tracing of the fractures that movement creates in time and space. It seems sensible to say that his choreographies perform first and foremost a

⁴³ <http://www.agerpres.ro/ots/2016/02/08/premiera-la-teatrul-national-bucuresti-l-om-dada-un-nou-proiect-semnat-gigi-caciuleanu-16-46-43>

⁴⁴ Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency*, work cited, p. 94.

mapping of the Real, even the more so if we think that to him choreographic theatre should ideally be seen from above, as this would render more visible the drawing it performs on stage.

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