





*'Om emoties op het toneel over te brengen, moeten dansers zo emotioneel mogelijk zijn. De emotionaaliiteit van mijn stukken zit in de structuur van de beweging.'*

het gelukkig van ook weer betonen. Dan is het emotioneel over naar zijn gevoel.

**WATREMERS**  
 Van Dijk en de andere dansers van de choreografie hebben wel betrouwbare bewegingen die heten, van de beweging tot de afsluiting, verhoudend als in een scène. Het is belangrijk dat de danser de beweging kan uitvoeren, en dat niet lang is in de klas. Van Dijk heeft een voorkeur voor de afsluiting in een dynamische balans. Dat betekent dat de danser de beweging moet kunnen uitvoeren. Het is belangrijk dat de danser de beweging kan uitvoeren. Het is belangrijk dat de danser de beweging kan uitvoeren.

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Choreographers such as William Forsythe and Amanda Miller, with whose Pretty Ugly Dance Company Van Dijk danced for a couple of years, swear by Laban's view that the space around the body consists of different three-dimensional fields, which each have a number of connecting points. Dancers who refer to this can give an almost transparent three-dimensionality to their extreme, virtuoso movements.

Van Dijk: 'Forsythe and Miller are, in fact, also working with external counterdirections, though they may not call it by the same name. For example, a dancer sends his foot to a point in space in front of him, while his hand reaches to a point in space behind him. And for that matter, all choreography is engaged in this way; with deconstruction and isolation. The Countertechnique is a method which sets out the spatial possibilities of the body and the space surrounding it. It is a way of training the mind in what the body does naturally. When I teach, I notice that many dancers, even those with Forsythe or Miller, have had the natural element driven out of them over the years, and that they mistakenly regard their pelvis as an anchor. By consciously applying the

Countertechnique, they develop a greater awareness of space. Once that awareness is present, and once dancers trust in these natural counterdirections, they can gradually begin to let go. Then the natural has once more become natural.

**HALLMARK**

With her Countertechnique, Van Dijk reveals a human body full of bony contradictions, with all the bones, from elbow to shoulder blade, relating to each other and to the three-dimensional space surrounding them with counterdirections. A body which thus consists of polarised forces that are continually influencing one another and which, no longer clamped in the vice of the traditional pelvic corset, can breathe freely in dynamic balance. From a pedagogic point of view, this is interesting and an enrichment. But does it also leave a hallmark on her work? In other words, can the Countertechnique principles used in the studio analyses be applied in practice to her theatre performances? Van Dijk: 'In my performances, I always work with opposing forces, both physically and mentally. I see the Countertechnique as a means for achieving that goal, as I did, in fact, long before I came to regard it as a technique as such.'

On close inspection, Van Dijk's oeuvre does indeed show the hallmark of 'counterdirections' at various levels. All the dynamics on stage are created by oppositions which are continually influencing one another. In an idiom which couples flowing movements with contrary twists and turns, her dancers are continually balancing on the edge of control and loss of control, vulnerability and power. Van Dijk often uses thematic oppositions, as well. Her *Adriana's trilogie*, for example, is all about vitality and decay. In *Hart, kwink, moker* (1994), a dancer obsessed by the classical beauty of her arms changes into a granny bowed over by her hunchback. In *My jester* (1996), a dancer with enormous false eyelashes becomes literally blinded by her vanity. In *Eter/Ether* (1998), a dancer dies, following a trembling solo, and is later reborn roaring with laughter. Other thematic oppositions which appear in Van Dijk's work include revelry and loneliness (*Nothing hurts*, 1999), hero and antihero (*Microman*, 2000), aloofness and submission (*Alien (i am sorry)*, 2001), Barbie doll and woman (*Diva*, 2002), desire and fulfilment (*Amour fou*, 2003).

Van Dijk: 'My work is always about people trying to keep their balance between the oppositions which they themselves embody. Oppositions such as vitality and decay, revelry and loneliness, aloofness and submission,

but also more direct oppositions like love and hate, aggression and tenderness, beauty and ugliness are united in one body. They all come as part of the same kit. Someone who is in love is teetering on the edge of hate and a beautiful person always sees the reflection of their own ugliness, as well. So I regard people as dualistic beings who, in order to keep going, must always be in a mental state of dynamic balance. I want to express that physically, and the Countertechnique is an ideal method for achieving that. Over the years, I have increasingly come to see physical counterdirections as the reflection of a psychological structure.'

In her work, then, there are increasing signs of an often bizarre emotional dramaturgy, with certainty as the extreme of uncertainty, jest as seriousness, and compassion as deferred cruelty. With a little dig at the postmodern, fragmented person, Van Dijk shows the drama of the tyrant who weeps for his victim, and of the happiness that turns out to be misery. While the polarised moods still alternate in a piece like *Hart, kwink, moker*, they seem almost to amalgamate in her more recent pieces. In *Alien*, a male dancer embraces a female dancer in a stranglehold. In *Amour fou*, the body which craves fulfilment is wrapped in transparent plastic. In *Suna no onna* (2003), a dancer labours over a never-ending task; he shows his strength by walking up a sloping plank covered in sand, but also his weakness by slipping down again with each step. But isn't all this emotionality, hybrid or not, at odds with the dry, analytical, mathematical approach of the Countertechnique? Aren't these two approaches at variance with one another? Van Dijk: 'Totally – but they have to be. Because in order to express emotions on stage, the dancers have to be as unemotional as possible. The emotionality of my pieces lies in the structure of the movements. I am not an actor, but I think that dance is completely different to theatre in this respect. I only fully realised this during the working process of *Nothing hurts*, a piece I made in collaboration with the German director Falk Richter. When the dancers reached the same level of emotion as the actors, they just couldn't move any more. It had a constraining effect. During that same working process, I also became aware, for the first time, of the principles of what I now call the Countertechnique. A rapid emotional changeover, from aggression to tenderness, for instance, has nothing to do with actually feeling those emotions. It has to do with space, with directed energy and with sending out the movements in counterdirections in order to retain a state of dynamic balance. This gives the dancers on stage a sort of transparency; they open up, as it were. And this is exactly what makes them human in the eyes of the audience; emotional, capricious beings. But the dancers themselves feel none of that. At most, they are thinking: thigh goes down, pelvis up, heel backwards, knee forwards. Emotions are spatial directions.

#### DANCERS' BREATH

A very recent experience reinforced Van Dijk in her convictions when she presented her new performance *STAU* in Studio Dok, on the Entrepotdok in Amsterdam. It is based on the abstract opposition between large and small spaces. In the Studio, a tiny dancing area was created, fenced off by chairs. Two dancers kept almost brushing the rather timid faces of the audience – the dancers' sweat, the dancers' warmth, the dancers' breath – it could all be felt, seen and smelt by the audience, sometimes only a couple of millimetres away. Later on, the dancing area was made larger; the chairs were stacked up in a corner and the audience promptly lost their seats and stood, sat or lay down in the space in between the dancers. As a real participating audience. Van Dijk asked the audience to fill in their responses to this on a questionnaire after the performance. 'Their responses all turned out to be extremely emotional,' she said. 'One person might feel embarrassed, another giggly, while yet another was moved. And all of that while the dancers were only occupied with counterdirections. What's more, if they hadn't been using these, especially in the small space, then they would have flown all over the place or hit someone in the face. So I see the Countertechnique as a physical and mental necessity, with theatrical consequences. Without this technique, I would never have been able to make *STAU*.

#### ISABELLA STEENBERGEN