COMPLEXITY OF BELONGING

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DRAMATURG, COMPLEXITY OF BELONGING

Of course, there is a great deal of theoretical material available to the artist when preparing a production with the title "Complexity of Belonging". An investigation into "belonging" takes as its subsets the themes of identification, identity and recognition. The tension underlying this investigation revolves around dichotomies of choice. Both the individual and the group are, at least in the western contemporary world, free to perform their identity of choice, to choose amongst a bewildering array of options how to represent themselves.

Free to choose allegiances and alliances, free to construct identity from a multitude of modalities. On the other hand, reactionary forces move against this diversity. Nationalisms and jingoisms press strongly on identity, particularly in the questions of race, religion, gender and sexuality. How we perceive ourselves is in contest with how others wish to perceive us. We are dealing with a moment in history where the understanding of the "real self" is more fluid than ever, gender, sexuality, nationality and even race are, in theory at least, questions of choice and seemingly infinite complexity, while prescribed senses of belonging – whether by political leaders, cultural norms, or religious interdiction – bring with them a direct threat to a pluralistic and equitable society and appear more powerful than ever.

In *Complexity of Belonging*, Richter and van Dijk push the theoretical scaffolding into the background, as Richter says, "At its core, belonging is not a theoretical construct but rather an individual experience." In what amounts to a political as well as artistic strategy, these artists bring the personal experiences of the individual performers to the fore, constructing texts that find their origins in the unique body and the eccentricities of personal history: in both the unity and fragmentation that "authentic" biography can provide. This material is then presented, adapted and re-contextualised so that it can also exist in a poetic space, a space of melodrama and tragedy, of the idealized and the epic.

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The unique form of dance-theatre that Richter and van Dijk have pioneered means that one is never simply talking of text without simultaneously encountering choreography, and vice versa. The individual search for belonging, the construction of identity, the craving for recognition and the refusal to be pigeon-holed are dramas that are informed both by this style and also the choice of an impossibly large canvas: Australia.

Triviality and profundity jostle in a kind of *comédie humaine*, a panorama of human stories from internet dating to long-distance relationships to the intimacy of bodies huddling together under a vast Australian sky. From the triumphs of personal victory in the battle to author oneself, to the tragedy of stuck-ness and limitations, of the body, of language, of the self.

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This is a choreography of environmental grandeur and psycho-geographical precision. The athleticism typical of the Australian dancer is contrasted with a hyper-articulated body that contorts and adapts itself under the pressure of urban stress. Everything is striving to thrive, to emerge from under a great downward pressure on the individual body. Verticality is only fleetingly achieved. Paradoxically, this is not simply a dystopic vision, either of landscape or our place in it. As van Dijk says, "The body's connection with the earth, with the land, with its immediate surroundings and with another body can provide anchors in a time of complexity".

In a symbiotic matrix with the choreography, Richter's text revolves around quotidian speech that has sprung from the performers but also re-appear in sudden rushes of the poetic as the individual drive for the comforts of belonging burst forth; specifically for recognition, for space, for rest and time. In these moments, the experience of being in Australia finds its power; what it means to be "on the other side of the world" both literally and metaphorically; the extremity of difference between urban and Outback life; the distance between couples, between languages, between expectations and desires. Vast chasms that open suddenly between lovers, intimacies discovered with the speed and chaos of a dust storm. A centrifugal pull is generated by research, enquiry and curiosity around the subjects: authenticity, identity and strangeness: the search for a sense of belonging.

Sometimes playful, sometimes terrifying this is at once the view of the outsider looking in on a strange land as well as an internal vision of country and identity as experienced by individual Australians.

At times an investigation into the clichés surrounding identity, at others a deeply personal experience of gender-division, contemporary courtship rituals, surprising discoveries around race-identity, and the plurality of our increasingly fragmented sub-cultural modes of behavior and self-identification.

COMPLEXITY OF BELONGING
A PROJECT BY FALK RICHTER & ANOUK VAN DIJK

Mon 6 Oct – Sat 1 Nov
SOUTHBANK THEATRE, THE SUMNER

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