

Lettres à Zerty

Initial situation, disruptive element, a succession of incidents, resolution, final situation

Duet 2015 | 25 min

A show for all audiences, originally commissioned for young audiences by CDC Le Gymnase and CDC Le Cuvier.

COMPAGNIE
PAR TERRE
ANNE NGUYEN



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Lettres à Zerty

Initial situation, disruptive element, a succession of incidents, resolution, final situation

Two virtuoso breakdancers are seen as they set in motion and dart away from each other amid fleeting moments of contact and an interplay of moves choreographed for two. Their fluid movements are deliberately fragmented as their bodies go into stop-motion and are thrown into darkness, which thereby interrupts the action in mid-flow. Our eyes are filled with powerful images, inviting us to reflect upon the different kinds of relationship that might exist between the two dancers. And yet images appear, change shape and switch places without really forming a logical progression of events. Are these images designed to tell us a story? What to do with this information and the apparent lack of narrative formed by a succession of events linked by a logical chronology? Once upon a time... *Lettres à Zerty* proposes another view of humanity, a vision of the world, wherein events are treated in a non-hierarchical, indiscriminate fashion.

* *Breakdance: a hip-hop dance specialty mainly performed on the floor, based on centrifugal, acrobatic movements.*

Key ideas

- AZERTY refers to the first six keys on the upper row of a French keyboard. It is a standard derivation of the QWERTY keyboard, patented for typewriters in 1873 by the American, Christopher Latham Sholes. The layout is adjusted to the speed at which the keys of a keyboard are struck, and was designed to prevent problems with the mechanism, taking into account the most commonly employed letters in the English language and the different position of the fingers.
- Traditionally, a story revolves around the following five stages in a narrative: initial situation, disruptive element, a succession of incidents, the resolution, and the final situation. In *Lettres à Zerty*, this narrative is absent.

Context of project

As part of the commission *Au pied de la lettre*, CDC Le Gymnase and CDC Le Cuvier invited Anne Nguyen to create a choreographic piece aimed at young audiences based on her own reinterpretation of a novel of her choice. How to turn a text into choreography, a written word into movement, and does any of the narrative remain once the human body interprets the story? Anne Nguyen's piece is loosely based on an excerpt from Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, a work that she feels recalls her own vision of choreography in that it challenges the rules governing classic narration and depicts the world as a playground, wherein events and man's interpretations emerge and take shape from randomness.

Excerpt from Roberts Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*

"It struck him that when one is overburdened and dreams of simplifying one's life, the basic law of this life, the law one longs for, is nothing other than that of narrative order, the simple order that enables one to say: "First this happened and then that happened..." It is the simple sequence of events in which the overwhelmingly manifold nature of things is represented, in a unidimensional order, as a mathematician would say, stringing all that has occurred in space and time on a single thread, which calms us; that celebrated "thread of the story," which is, it seems, the thread of life itself. Lucky the man who can say "when," "before," and "after!" Terrible things may have happened to him, he may have writhed in pain, but as soon as he can tell what happened in chronological order, he feels as contented as if the sun were warming his belly. This is the trick the novel artificially turns to account: whether the wanderer is riding on the highway in pouring rain or crunching through snow and ice at ten below zero, the reader feels a cozy glow, and this would be hard to understand if this eternally dependable narrative device, which even nursemaids can rely on to keep their little charges quiet, this tried-and-true "foreshortening of the mind's perspective," were not already part and parcel of life itself. Most people relate to themselves as storytellers. They usually have no use for poems, and although the occasional "because" or "in order that" gets knotted into the thread of life, they generally detest any brooding that goes beyond that; they love the orderly sequence of facts because it has the look of necessity, and the impression that their life has a "course" is somehow their refuge from chaos. It now came to Ulrich that he had lost this elementary, narrative mode of thought to which private life still clings, even though everything in public life has already ceased to be a narrative and no longer follows a thread, but instead spreads out as an infinitely interwoven surface. "These days," he thought, "a man can only allow himself to forget the uncertainties on which he must base his life and his actions as much as an actor who forgets the scenery and his makeup, and believes that he is really living his part."

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (1930-1932)



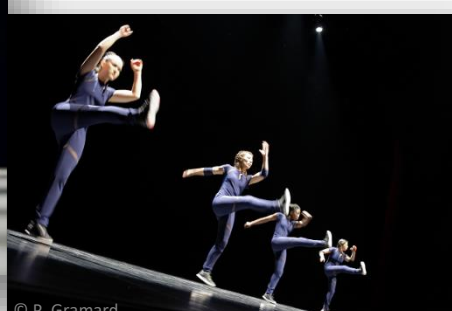
Choreographer: Anne Nguyen



As a dancer specialized in breakdance and familiar with the world of hip-hop battles, Anne Nguyen founded the par Terre Dance Company in 2005. The scientific thought as well as her practice of several martial arts inspire her to conceive choreographic universes that sublimate the hip-hop dance and its essence. By setting precise gestures, geometrical constraints, energy and density contrasts, intertwining of bodies and dance mechanisms, and unexpected occupations of space, she combines a raw, accomplished hip-hop dance with a graphic, pure, deconstructed choreographic writing. Her choreographic pieces display a complex, precise architecture and alternate between controlled spaces prompting personal interpretations and spaces left to chance, or calling for improvisation, which can be fraught with risks. With architectural geometric declinations in *Square Root*, uninterrupted flow of dance particles in continual transformation in *PROMENADE OBLIGATOIRE*, robotic partition of revisited couple dances in *bal.exe*, games of strategy in pursuit of territory in *Autarcie (...)*, variant of the breakdance in the form of martial arts in *Kata*, her creations reflect the forms and energies that surround human beings in the contemporary world. They combine poetry and mathematics, sensuality and explosiveness. They explore the links between music and

dance, through original musical creations and a reflection on the dancer's relationship to music and time. Through her choreographic creations, Anne Nguyen questions the value given to the observer and the connection between individuals. She likes to create new relationships between the audience and dance, which she implements through hybrid projects like *Dance of the city warriors*, a course of participative and immersive installations crossing hip-hop dance with the world of video and virtual reality, or with *Graphic Cyphers*, an immersive choreographic concept for the public space.

Anne Nguyen is currently working with more than thirty hip-hop dancers with different specialities (breakdance, popping and waacking) on her different touring productions, and she herself performs in several of them such as *Racine Carrée* and *Yonder Woman*. Anne Nguyen's first production, the solo *Square Root* (2007) relates the geometry found in breakdance movements to the contemporary urban environment. It combines mathematical dance compositions with some of Anne's poems. The solo won second prize in the Masdanza contemporary choreography competition in 2009. Anne Nguyen also choreographed *Keep it Funky!* (2007), a celebratory piece devised for six lockers, and *Spirit of the Underground* (2008), a performance for five dancers and one actress, on the themes of contact and dreams. Her duet *Yonder Woman* (2010), an "experiment for two superhero women", analyses the notion of performance through a game-play based on linear progress and relationship behaviours. Her 2012 production *PROMENADE OBLIGATOIRE* is a one-hour walk for eight poppers, who undertake an uninterrupted crossing along the timeline, in an exploration of the different possible states of "being together". In Anne's 2013 production for quartet *Autarcie (...)*, she explores the inner workings of a restless "tribe", with all the power struggles that ensue. In her 2014 production *bal.exe*, a "mechanical ball set to chamber music" for eight poppers and five classical musicians, robotic dancers engage into a new "mechanical" dance style performed in pairs, called "looping pop". Anne Nguyen staged the duet *Lettres à Zerty* in 2015 as part of a commission for young audiences by CDC Le Gymnase and CDC Le Cuvier. In October 2016, Anne Nguyen created *Dance of the city warriors*, an immersive, participatory course of installations centered on hip-hop dance, implementing live video capture and editing interactive video processes and performances danced in situ. In October 2017, Anne Nguyen will stage *Kata*, a show for eight breakdancers that lends form to the warrior-like energy of breakdance. The movements are decomposed into sequences of linear moves and evolve into genuine fights played. She is planning to stage a new production in 2019.



Dancer and choreographer of the par Terre Dance Company, Anne Nguyen is first and foremost a B-girl, specialising in hip-hop floorworks. She has performed with many hip-hop and contemporary dance companies such as Black Blanc Beur, Faustin Linyekula and Salia Ni Seydou. She formed part of the breakdance crews RedMask in Montreal, as well as Phase T, Def Dogz and Créteil Style in Paris, and has taken part in hundreds of battles, either solo or in groups, winning several high-profile competitions, such as IBE 2004 or BOTY 2005. She has served as judge on many others, including BOTY 2006 and Redbull BC One 2007. She makes an appearance in the documentary film *Planet B-Boy* (2007).

Anne Nguyen also writes poetry, short prose items and articles on dance (*Danser* magazine, *Repères*, *cahier de danse*). Excerpts from her collection of poems, the *Manual of the City Warrior*, have been published in *Graffiti!* magazine, on which she was chief editor of the dance section. Several pieces performed by the Dance Company incorporate Anne Nguyen's texts, recorded or spoken (*Square Root*, *Spirit of the Underground*). Anne teaches hip-hop dance using a method based on postures, on the deconstruction of dance moves and on their subsequent deployment within the performance space. Since 2012, she has taught a technical and theoretical workshop on hip-hop dance at the University of Sciences Po Paris, called *Hip-hop, a contemporary culture*.

Keen on collaborating and cross-referencing within artistic milieux, Anne Nguyen created in 2014 the piece *i* as part of the trilogy for six dancers and three choreographers *La preuve par l'autre* commissioned by the Malka Dance Company. She has also worked as choreographic consultant to Australian choreographer Nick Power, in Sydney, for his 2014 production *Cypher*.

Anne Nguyen was awarded the 2013 SADC Nouveau Talent Chorégraphie prize and appointed Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2015.

“ It's a sort of b-boying performance in the style of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker. Or rather a kind of breakdance crossed with the concepts of William Forsythe. Choreographer Anne Nguyen is used to these kinds of comments about her work. She understands the comparison as she is keen to deconstruct hip-hop vocabulary in order to reconstruct it, like a puzzle, to create her increasingly acclaimed choreographies.

Libération – Eve Beauvallet (May 5th, 2015)

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Cast

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Choreography: Anne Nguyen

Dancers: Mahamadou Gassama alias "Gassama", Alex Tuy alias "Rotha"

Lighting design: Ydir Acef

► Lighting design

Ydir Acef

Ydir Acef has worked as a lighting and sound technician since 1991. He collaborated with le Théâtre du Lucernaire, le Théâtre du Tourtour and le Forum du Blanc-Mesnil. Since 1997, he has designed lighting for several Theater and Dance Companies (*Groupe Le Chiendent*, *Cie ACTA / Agnès Desfosses*, *Théâtre Carpe Diem*, *6TD Company*...). Ydir Acef has worked as a lighting technician for the par Terre Dance Company since 2008. He created the lighting designs for the pieces *Yonder Woman* in 2010, *PROMENADE OBLIGATOIRE* in 2012, *Autarcie (...)* in 2013 and *bal.exe* in 2014. In 2017 he will create the lighting design of the production *Kata*.

Partners

Devised as part of the commission *Au pied de la lettre*, within the program *La Belle Saison avec l'enfance et la jeunesse*.

Delegated production: Le Gymnase | CDC Roubaix (spectacle) et Le Cuvier CDC d'Aquitaine (educational tools).

Coproduction : Agence Culturelle Départementale Dordogne-Périgord ; CDC Atelier de Paris-Carolyn Carlson ; Ballet du Nord – Olivier Dubois / CCN Roubaix Nord – Pas de Calais ; CCN Malandain Ballet Biarritz ; L'Echangeur – CDC Picardie ; Le Grand Bleu – Etablissement National de Production et de Diffusion Artistique Lille ; La Briqueterie CDC du Val-de-Marne.

In partnership with la Maison de la Danse de Lyon.

With the support of Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication / Direction Générale de la Création Artistique (for educational tools).

The par Terre Dance Company is funded by l'aide à la compagnie de la DRAC Ile-de-France, la Région Ile-de-France, l'aide au fonctionnement du Département du Val-de-Marne and le soutien du Département de Seine-Saint-Denis.

Anne Nguyen is an associated artist to Chaillot – Théâtre national de la Danse until 2018.

The par Terre Dance Company has been invited to take part in artist-in-residence programmes at l'Espace 1789 de Saint-Ouen (93) for the 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18 seasons and at Scènes du Golfe - Vannes et Arradon (56) for the 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 seasons.

Booking information

Duration: 25 minutes.

Technical requirements:

- Level surface (no rake), covered entirely with a black dance floor.
- Black border set with 4 borders.
- Black back-drop.
- The piece can be performed outdoors, on a flat, smooth surface.
- This piece has no prop requirements.
- Opening of the proscenium: 12 meters (minimum 10 meters).
- Depth from the proscenium to the back drop: 9 meters (minimum 8 meters).
- Width between legs stage left to legs stage right: 10 meters (minimum 9 meters).
- Height under grid: 6 meters (minimum 4 meters).

Touring staff: 4 persons (2 dancers, 1 technician, 1 touring manager).

Travel: 3 persons coming from Paris, 1 dancer coming from Lyon.

Arrival the day before the performance. Leaving the day after the performance.

Booking fees: Available on request.

Technical rider: Contact us.

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