

# The Angels' Hideout

## *Between Dance and Theatre*

by Enrique Pardo

"Molti parlano di ispirazione di anima e nessuno di cultura.  
Quando io parlo del corpo alludo alla cultura, perché la cultura è un corpo.  
Se il cibo modella l'anima, la cultura modella i tratti somatici,  
rende viscerale o no il nostro sentire"  
Alda Merini <sup>1</sup>

"Many speak of the soul's inspiration, no-one of culture.  
When I speak of body I am referring to culture, because culture is a body.  
If food shapes the soul, culture shapes the somatic traits,  
makes our capacity to feel visceral or not"

Our century has seen a succession of artistic expeditions towards a promised land somewhere between dance and theatre, a performance geography where literature and the physical body might meet, enhance each other's possibilities, and yield more complex images than they would if they were staged as protagonists in their own domain. This article is about one such expedition, a piece created in Paris in 1995/6 with five dancers; it addresses specific strategies of an approach to dance-theatre - I will tend to speak of "*choreographic theatre*" - and includes mythological reflections on dance as seen by an outsider. It also presents a militant view of emotion in performance, one that brings in angelology: the "angels' hideout" as the possible place referred to by Alda Merini, where our "capacity to feel visceral(ly) or not" is shaped, educated, per-formed: emotion as an "*ange qui dérange*", as a disturbing angel.

The search for dance-theatre hybrids gets attacked by purists on both sides. Official french theatre policy is designed to produce 'authors' (and hopefully, one day, France's much longed-for Shakespeare). The emphasis is fundamentally literary: theatre, as it will pass into History, is seen primarily on the printed page; words rule the stage, often in torrential deliveries. French dance milieux, on the other hand, and especially during the late eighties, invoked the notion of "théâtralité" (theatricality), usually defined as that which remains in theatre after words have been taken away. For many choreographers this was an opening into a new semiotics of dance, a way out of the cannons of strictly gestural composition. For the purists it was gimmickry. From my point of view, if dance-theatre wishes to confront

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<sup>1</sup> Alda Merini, in "La pazza della porta accanto", Bompiani, Milano 1995. In June 96 I directed a choreographic theatre piece based on Merini's writings about her relationship with a tramp named Titano : "Often while he made love to me, I was 'elsewhere'. My absence excited him because it is the way prostitutes offer themselves : smoking the cigarette of dreams". The title of the piece was "Mozzicone" - the italian polite word for cigarette butts, (Milano/Asti 1996, a Estia, Buratto, Alfieri production). Merini's writings (and tragic life) are quite extraordinary; she was put forwards for the Nobel prize - it went to fellow Italian Dario Fo.

language, the spoken word, and connect to its metaphorical and emotional implications, it cannot stop at movement with some voice effects, or at the exploration of aleatoric juxtapositions of gesture and word.

My own artistic roots are a hybrid jumble, professionally (visual arts, voice performer, corporal training, etc.) and culturally, but I am primarily concerned with language, the elaboration of metaphors that include the spoken word - and it is in the performing arts that I feel one can best 'realize', give body to the metaphorical, imaginal potential of language. I come from theatre (initially through voice work), and moved to contemporary dance (and corporal mime, and other traditions) to find a working dialogue not only with eloquent and moving bodies, but with *choreography*: how choreography elaborates a 'con-text', a place, a landscape of relations and moves, a physical dramaturgy that can withstand the impact of 'text', and of the 'authoritarian' power of literature, and not be reduced to an illustrative frame.

## Dialogues with Dance

*We inhabit and dance our bodies as mythical temples. There are many Gods and Goddesses, and each has his or her temples and rituals : each has his or her own 'theatre'. An archetypal approach to dance studies its images and principles in the very roots of culture, in the figures and stories of mythology. Placing dance in a polytheistic context of cultural diversity and of esthetic differences encourages multiplicity (all mythic wars start with exclusions!), as well as critical confrontation."*<sup>2</sup>

Before moving into specific strategies pertaining to the interplay between dance and theatre, some remarks on dance from an outsider's point of view, one searching for a choreographic collaboration.

### 1 -- Diana's Bath : Dance and Virginité

Contemporary dance studios are often temples of "feeling", pervaded by a mystique of sensitivity; the mood in them can be quintessentially artemisian (*Artemis*, the roman *Diana*) : private, feminine, soft, delicate, pure, devoted to febrile and sometimes fanatic listening of *inner* sensations. The atmosphere is that of Diana at her bath : clear water and pristine wilderness, protected groves, untainted by any hint of specularly or seduction (except of course for the narcissism of mirrors when they appear - but that is another matter: here I am referring to the gaze of the spectator). The image of Diana and her nymphs washing their limbs offers a personified picture of nature's virginal ecology: no artifice but devoted care for 'the right' postures and optimum muscle tone. Serious, sensitive, silent, usually pale, and tremendously self-involved. We are as far as can be from one of the original words for 'actor': *hypokritos*.

Karine Saporta, a leading and spectacular choreographer, something of France's contemporary Cleopatra, blasts at the precious privacy in these attitudes. Charismatic, fiery and biting eloquent, she is in turn reviled for breaking bodies and reducing them to puppets; her shows do not skirt *femme fatale* theatrics and luxurious pageants - she choreographed the dancing for Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*. She accuses artemisian devotees of reaching degrees of sensitivity where they can no longer bear the gaze of a spectator - the ultimate withdrawal of dance from show.

This quarrel has mythical dimensions. The hunter Acteon was torn to pieces by his own hounds for watching Artemis/Diana at her bath, for introducing an Aphroditian gaze into a

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Quote from Pantheatre's "choreographic theatre" yearly professional training program in France.

virginal setting; Artemis would accuse him of pollution and pornography. Not only is there a sense in which one is not supposed to gaze at artemisian moves, but, in their so-called natural, pure, even wild esthetic, there is a refusal of metaphorical displacement: dance is a question of being, certainly not of showing, or of allowing an associative glance. If Artemis (personified in a woman or a man) passes your way, admire the transparent freshness of her/his swift body, fit and nimble, svelte and slender, the transfiguration of her/his healthy well-being... Enjoy the shine, the athletic allure, the sporty companionship, the sibling enthusiasm she/he might share with you. But, if transparency is resented and you sense a refusal of your gaze and of your presence as a spectator, if there is a protective reaction of privacy (what has been called the Goddess's "vicious shyness"), then one is confronting a dangerous Artemis, one that must not be drawn into theatre but left to celebrate her private rituals. One also encounters, as in all closed mythological schools, something that could be called "artemisian proselytism" : the righteousness of those who are not interested in your performance but who want to put your bodies 'right'.

## 2 - Aphrodite's specularity

Diana's baths are very different from Aphrodite's (or Hera's), by which they renew their virginity in order to reoffer it every night, afresh. Diana's bath takes place after the hunt - hunting being her preserve. There is symbiosis between the Goddess and her animals : wild, fast, fresh, alert. Hunting for her is an athletic and exhilarating identification with the hunted. Artemisian abstraction (abstracted out of metaphor, among other things) partakes of these game patterns: the stage as a clearing, traversed by fast fleeting silhouettes, visited by diaphanous presences. Diana's identification with hunting involves killing : she both protects and hunts down her animals, tracking, outsmarting and finally surprising them for the kill. She is a detached killer, striking from a distance, with arrow or javelin, like her brother Apollo, and unlike Dionysus' maenads who tear animals (and children, and men...) with their bare hands and teeth. Diana's bathing comes after all the sweat, the running, the exacting and exhilarating competition, the keen adrenaline and its ultimate release in the kill. The bath is a private grooming, a proud and soothing reward to one's wild animal body, muscle tone and healthy skin, and to one's killing fitness. She is often pictured sharing this ritual with her shy and ferocious greyhounds.

Aphrodite, on the other hand, rejoices in looks. As *Porneia* she embraces pornography within her domains of 'grace' - at war with current puritanism which wants to get rid of its obscenity (socio-economical for instance) by unloading it onto pornography. Aphrodite blesses the intercourse between vision and sex, arouses the world through looks, disseminates beauty through specular desire, through display : cosmetics enhancing the cosmos. In the stories where she is betrayed, flouted or mocked, she is as murderous as Artemis, or any repressed Goddess or God for that matter. Repressed principles return with a fanatical and tyrannical outlook, rejecting theological alternatives, let alone allowing any form of mythical democracy, and therefore refusing to enter into a theatre that would include but relativise their esthetics.

## 3 -- *Le Théâtre de la Ville*

In the last fifteen years french contemporary dance performances have been drawn into a vortex whose top model and ambition is *Le Théâtre de la Ville*, with a huge, frontal stage for some 2000 spectators, akin to a steep movie house, or worse, and especially with dance, to a grand aquarium. The expectation is one of "major" performances, and choreographers have stumbled willy nilly into productions that last over an hour in order to fulfil this model. Rarely do they present, as in the past, a repertoire program of dance pieces. The Pina Bausch monumental model prevails, over, say, a Merce Cunningham program. Very few performances can sustain their propositions beyond thirty minutes, if that, and one ends up with long 'assemblages', drawn-out variations on a particular theme or esthetical

atmosphere, or extended collages exploiting two or three basic choreographic or scenographic parameters. Rarely can one speak of them as having any sense of depth dramaturgy, mythical complexity or psychological substance.

Choreography is one thing, tackling theatre models is another. French dance blossomed during the eighties ("les années fric"), fearlessly using the 'major' model, and fully promoted by fashionable socialism (under Jack Lang's flashy reign as minister of culture). The contrast with Britain is worth observing, Britain being a poor relation as far as state subsidies to the arts is concerned. Attitudes there tend to be much tougher, with an avowed allergy to French eighties' dance-theatre proposals. The most violent reactions came from two camps: the abstract-dance purists (who, to a large extent, perform by the frugal ethics of Artemis), and from what I call the British Cromwellian tendency : punkish, anti-arty, aggressive, and, to a great extent, northern "protestant" iconoclasts. Their battlecry belongs to yet another mythical (and historical) war, in this case, against French 'catholic', 'effeminate' cultural icons, and it can be a very refreshing and salutary reaction, salting and grounding artistic endeavor. But this particular kind of puritanical iconoclasm can also be regressively and tyrannically anti-cultural, and end up worshiping some dour, nihilistic and barbarian Saturn.

### **Choreographic Theatre**

Two working principles : *Conversion* and *Contradiction*

No single label can do justice to the fullness or complexity of an artistic research. My own reason for preferring "choreographic theatre" to other terms such as "dance-theatre" or "physical theatre", is because it contains chorus, graphics and theatre. It implies bodies in image, and the 'theatre' between them - which, again, includes the spoken word, language, text, as one of its fundamental components. The other components of image are: the visual (all "graphia": gestural, choral, pictorial), language (literary images), the voice (which, like dance, can separate or even contradict language, and trigger its own realm of music and images), and music.

I wish to focus on two working principles particularly concerned with the dynamic between dance and language. The aim is to be able to move back and forth between dance and language, to alternate between the two, to juxtapose and intermingle them, and, above all, to metamorphose them into each other. The first principle is that of CONVERSION - conversion from dance to text, and back again. Conversion, first, as in religion, like Saint Paul, knocked off his high horse (and getting onto another one!) on the road to Damascus. This implies the capacity to radically change ones driving faith, styles and systems of expression. It speaks for versatility and casuistics (an adult, adulterous and adulterating process), the capacity for alternation and change. Secondly, conversion as in thermodynamics, where heat is turned into movement and vice versa: waterfalls into electricity, fuels exploding into speed or imploding into diamonds. Essential within this more mechanistic approach to conversion is the capacity to disassociate: like training to play the piano with two hands, one gains the artistic autonomy to join or separate language and gesture, including counterpoint, syncopation, dynamic transfers and the musical control of emotion and energy (which tend to be primordial, organic, associative, 're-remembering' factors).

Third, conversion as in the early days of psychiatry, where the "syndrome of conversion" was played out in the great XIXth century amphi-theaters, and key words yielded extraordinary feats of 'physical theatre' : histrionics, logos spectacularly transformed into soma, psychosomatic drama, what came to be called hysteria. Much has been written about this 'theatre', whose benches laid the foundations for Freud's theories<sup>3</sup>. What interests me is

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1996 marked the centenary of the founding of psychoanalysis. The theatrics of hysteria and of memory, so crucial to the birth of psychoanalysis, made again sensational headlines with the postponement of the planned Freud centenary exhibition at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C. On hysteria, Sonu Shamdasani, one of

not the theatrical setting, but the underlying principles: association / conversion, the 'transport' (*metaphorein*) from one realm to another, from language to body gestures and symptoms - poetry being an associative activity (at least as far as language is concerned). Here, the model implies that through conversion, psyche (the unconscious, memory or imagination) is enacted and displayed in dance or, 'conversely', articulated in language. Meaning is extracted, shaped, converted back and forth between movement and language, each mutation a new commentary, a fresh layer of repercussions, a further poetical 'realization' - ("to realize what one is saying, or doing" means to realize the 'metaphorical reality' of a gesture or expression).

"Realization" is at the core of the performer's craft: she/he is *inside image*, is part of it, 'realizing' its body, giving it metaphorical reality. Conversion is one of the main tools in this instinctual hermeneutics, in the craft of dramatic interpretation : the meaning that emerges from how, when, why one shifts from language to movement. It means *making significant moves* within image, listening and 'realizing' what the overall image is saying, how it is coming across to the spectators. These 'moves' enrich, complexify, deepen its metaphorical body (or blast it through an iconoclastic initiative). Developing "*the instinct of image*" - an animal sense of image that allows for instinctual conversion moves - is the main point of choreographic theatre training.

The second working principle is the notion of CONTRADICTION. In theatre, language can be 'the enemy', usurping the body's autonomous expressivity, subduing dance, for instance, into a secondary illustrative or decorative mode. Textual dictatorship can impose its 'authoritarian' grip through the so-called respect of the author or through traditions of interpretation that constrain performing artists into set and often stale cultural moulds. Its tyranny on fiction can lead to rhetorical sclerosis, to linear story-telling and declamatory clichés. In training, at least, I treat texts as enemies, paying them a higher tribute, and giving interpreters a chance to live up to them, to face up to them. The strategy is one of contradiction (against-diction) and "inter-diction": inhibiting and making the delivery of words a prohibiting affair, coming under an interdict, repressing, arresting any naive approach to speech. This might sound forbidding, but the aim is actually to deliver the performer from the tyrannical power of language - an inevitable outcome if one goes to texts as Red Riding Hood went to the woods: the wolf of literature will get you. Resistance gives body to text (more on this below). I encourage "*negative listening*": the capacity to both listen and resist the text, even to counter it. This strategy is close to Keats' notion of "negative capability" : the ability to hold one's place as a performer when faced with the poetic polysemy of image, not to rush to an interpretation and allow complexity to proliferate.

The notion of "contradiction" differs from modernistic aleatoric performance procedures, where, for instance, a recorded speech is switched on, preferably of neutral delivery, while the performers count their steps in a dance routine, without connection, without emotion, without resistance - 'deadpan' encounters in a universe ruled by cool (and sometimes frozen) Kronos-like principles of geometric chance <sup>4</sup>.

## **Choreographic Theatre : The Sex of Angels**

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the scholars who signed the postponement petition, has this to say : "I have always understood hysteria to be a hypnotic artefact invented by physicians and cloned by patients."

<sup>4</sup> The differentiation between aleatoric and spontaneous outlooks, and the mantic and serendipitous traffic between them, is at the core of patterns of inspiration, and of age-old mythical wars (for instance the one between abstraction and figuration). In his "Pan and the Nightmare" (Spring Publications, Connecticut 1972), James Hillman tackles this area from the God Pan's perspective, and the principle of panic. Pantheatre was named in part after this essay.

Choreography, from this particular bias, is a mythography of sorts: it writes and reads patterns of relationships in a figurative cosmology. It transforms abstract space into places, revealing the potential exchanges between characters within mythological dramaturgies, and exploding, like dance, one-dimensional naturalism. It lets imagination breed in the angelic interstices; it gives density to the air through personifications, it constellates presences in between realities. Before releasing language into choreographic image-making, and in order to withstand its impact, choreography must first consolidate its own 'con-text', its own web of relations, stories, identities. When this *con-text* is solid enough, one can bring in text, so that text and context can meet, clash, dance, and this, with full paradoxical impact.

A striking psychological definition of body once put forwards by James Hillman in the context of theatre was that there is body wherever there is *resistance*. With provocative conciseness, and elegance, it sums up Psyche's perspective on body, caught in the double bind of desire and resistance of her relationship with Eros: his need for blind erotic involvement, her's for enlightenment - the need to confront the object of her desire. The physical bliss of her nights with Eros is sheer literal body; the suffering after the separation gives her metaphorical body - she breaks sexual fusion by lighting the candle and 'realizing' who her lover really is. (She also creates 'confusion', another important choreographic principle!).<sup>5</sup>

Each school of thought lives its idea of what body is as an ontological experience, and we all risk being fundamentalist about it. The idea that gives body to that so called "ontological experience" is much more difficult to apprehend since it surrounds and defines our very sense of being, and its ways of experiencing ; it shapes our esthetics, our modes of perception and our evaluation of that perception. "*Notre méconnaissance forme un système fermé, rien ne peut la réfuter*" ("Our ignorance constitutes a closed circuit, nothing can refute it" - Christa Wolf, in, *Medea*, 1996). It takes substantial cultural reflection to identify the idea that is moving us, and that 'salts' our experience and its pleasures.

I tend to place my working definition of body in territories similar to Hillman's. It is a semantic approach that finds body every time it encounters *the angel of meaning*: making sense, sensual meaning. There is body when associations coagulate ; when persons, objects, and the air around them are visited and animated by presences, memories, spirits - epiphanies, manifestations ; when metaphors rise, run and rain - body as sustained revelation, giving 'body' to our own physical bodies... matter awakened, quickened, set into motion by ideas... meaning as movement, movement as meaning... metamorphoses... objects, muscles, bones, skin, alive, transmuted, inhabited, moved... metaphoric animals, angels, and the flow of understandings... realizations, poetical harvests...

Underlying such a litany, especially one invoking angelology, is a basic philosophical bias: it requires the move from motion to emotion and it says that there is body wherever there is emotion. The encounter with the angel of meaning is permeated with emotion: ideas come enfolded in its wings. But the poor word (emotion) is so tired of being measured and calibrated in pharmacology, of being whipped up and acted out in all sorts of therapies, that one hardly dares to use it any more. To give emotion back some mythological life I would propose that what we call emotions today were once called angels - acknowledging that this is an overtly militant mytho-poetical move. Firstly, it removes emotion from personal, subjective ownership - rather than it being "ours" or "in us", emotions possess us. Inspiring presences, visitations, personified powers, emotions move us, often overwhelming, sometimes crushing - divine influxes, messengers from the ruling or unruly Gods. They come with divine intention, and power, and handle the synapses between message and

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<sup>5</sup> (see Apuleius's story of Psyche and Eros).

biology, mind and adrenaline. They 'make' sense, at once intellectual and emotional. If there is no angel, there is 'nobody'.

The Greek *angelos* means "messenger", and the arch-messenger in Greek mythology is Hermes, a God too often and too conveniently reduced to cybernetics, or at best to an ambivalent communications principle. To rehabilitate angelology, and especially a 'hermetic' one, and to shake off its aura of cute religiosity, we should return to the pagan figure of *daimon*, which holds together good angel, nasty demon and a lot more <sup>6</sup>. During a recent presentation by the French philosopher Michel Serres of a newly published and luxuriously illustrated book on angels, a dark and disgruntled daimon visited me with disruptive intentions. It started off by whispering in my ear that this so-called philosophical debate was really a sales promotion for the ultimate Christmas gift : fashionable and sexless angels, busy in the latest computers and Internet connections, efficient, fast, neutral, unconcerned with content. Michel Serres added a monotheistic twist to his put-down of Hermes in terms of "only one messenger for many Gods", (whereas in monotheism one gets "one God but many messengers"). Fra Angelico's brigades of winged youths, all the same in neat uniforms, in fanatic ranks singing up to "the one and only", can be seen as pious antecedents of not-so-distant parades on the Red Square, or worse, at Nuremberg, sprinkled with gold and artificial snow... Hermes was anything but sexless and neutral. The Homeric Hymn is explicit : he spends most of his time making love with nymphs in soft moss-covered dark caverns. Read it this way : the "principle of communication", so called neutral, is intimately, sexually, and constantly, involved with nymphs, with alluring anima figures, with the driving fantasies of life, with the feminine personifications of the world.

### "La Planque aux Anges"

The Angel's Hideout, ("La Planque aux Anges") is a shady canal-side 'cruising' area in downtown Strasbourg, hosting a succession of dubious activities, mainly to do with sex and drugs, as described by the French playwright Bernard Marie Koltès in an early novel of his, "La fuite à cheval / très loin dans la ville" (The horseback flight far into town) which I adapted as a performance in 1995/6. Koltès is probably the most performed playwright in France today; his plays involve dropout characters spinning webs of words around each other, in a unique mixture of seductive argumentation, aggressive zaniness, and disarming lyricism. These plays are also overwhelmingly literary - avalanches of words.

In adapting this novel, we skirted the tidal wave of his language, and the often heavy dialectical architecture. One critic described "La Planque aux Anges" in terms of cinema : images, action and the minimum necessary dialogues, no tirades, no spoken metaphysics - barely five pages of text. This piece was performed by five dancers, some of whom had practically no experience of spoken theatre. They trained in a two year research program called *Borderline*, exploring the frontiers of dance-theatre and venturing into borderline deconstructions of images and characters. All five interpreters were 29 or 30 years old, having trained and worked with major, and quite disparate, French and American dance companies. We chose Koltès together; paradoxically, the play's characters were mostly younger in age than the interpreters, but so scorched, hurt, lived, that their despair, and soul's age, seemed often out of reach.

"La Planque aux Anges" took off as a radical venture, with few concessions, and it was surprising to see, on arrival, the kind of acting that emerged and how it flowed into dance or

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<sup>6</sup> Recent scholarship has revisited the notion of emotion as daimonic, enlarging considerably the blinkers of scientific and anthropocentric thinking. See especially Ruth Padel, "In and Out of the Mind - Greek Images of the Tragic Self", 1992 Princeton University Press, and, "Whom Gods Destroy - Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness", 1995 Princeton University Press. For a mind-opening reactualisation of the notion of daimon, placed at the core of personality, see James Hillman, "The Soul's Code", 1996 Random House, NY.

out of it. The association with cinema initially surprised me, but made strong sense : all five dancers had accepted an adventure into highly strung acting, the stuff most of us in theatre (and so much more so in dance) have relinquished to film, with its close-ups on realistic emotional acting. Usually, when tears appear on stage I fear the worst : being dragged through thick tragedies and hours of overacting - emotion stylized into literary monuments. Yet it is something which in movies seems lighter and acceptable : to a large extent, realistic emotional acting, the legendary stuff of the Actor's Studio, has been handed over to films and TV. "La Planque aux Anges" rebelled against this so-called give-away, wishing to retrieve the stuff of emotions back to live, dancing bodies, without getting caught in ceremonial drama, and without bowing to the hypnotic paradise of movies, much as I enjoy it. As far as I am concerned, nothing can replace the challenge of a live performance, providing one can touch and be touched by its mythical pulse, brushed by its "wings of desire".

In retrospect it can be said that the piece 'zooms' in on emotions as they rise from contradictions, and 'pans' after their conversions. Spectators sat at the edge of both sides of a long, narrow performing area (12 by 5 meters), divided into three sections, or rooms : they were placed where the walls of the flat would have been, and confronted only one of the three 'rooms', with a partial view of the other two. No one had a detached, overall view - not only was the spectator not in a position of visual overlord, but he/she felt something of an intruder into the characters' life and space: a voyeur, peering into a hideout where angels were at work, distilling emotion into dance, or cornering it into some form of singing. Sometimes they (the hidden angels) made the characters go wild with shouting and dancing, or break down and cry alone in front of a mirror ; sometimes they would lie in bed, with them, idly dreaming in front of a TV screen, and occasionally gather these strands into one of Koltès speeches.

The program dedicated the piece "to the children of Hecate", drop-outs who loiter in nocturnal gangs with the bag-lady Goddess and her stray dogs, rummaging society's wastebins at the "trivia", the crossroads at the city outskirts. These are society's 'refuse', said to be the unsettled souls of violent and asocial deaths : victims of overdoses, murders, suicides, car crashes. They are the interfering, marauding spirits of occultism : spiritual pollution. "La Planque aux Anges" was presented during the August 95 *"Myth and Theatre" Festival* dedicated to *Magic*, and it shocked those who came to the Festival with salvationist expectations (magic as hope), or sensationalist ones (magic as shamanic surrealism). Although the piece made no overt reference to mythology, (nor to magic, for that matter), it invited in some of their darker angels. These stirred the air, upset and blew the characters' moods about. One did not confront grand allegories, black or white magic, but an in-between, borderline, complex world, made of contradictions, trivia, shadows, unhappy characters - insecure figures, adrift, yet managing to hold on to rare and precious moments of humour, tenderness, poetry and dance. They danced against all odds : physical and psychological. The setting was claustrophobic, crowded and cluttered : dancing was hard-earned and rose out of emotionally loaded texts and contexts, a density that, hopefully, gave the interpreters and their dance the sort of 'body' I have tried to describe in this article.