

**Becoming Insect: the Parasite in  
*Memòries d'una puça* (2012) by Sol Picó\***

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Dance exists at a perpetual vanishing point.  
At the moment of its creation it is gone.  
Marcia Siegel (1972, 1)

Sol Picó's career as a dancer and choreographer spans over twenty years. Born in Alcoi, in the Valencian Community, and a long-term resident of the city of Barcelona, her work has been widely acclaimed by audiences and critics alike but also recognised institutionally at regional and national level. Amongst the most prestigious awards she holds are the Premi Nacional de Dansa de la Generalitat de Catalunya (2004) and Spain's Premio Nacional de Danza (2016). Her artistic production has engaged habitually with social issues with a particular emphasis on the experience and condition of being a woman. Most illustrative of this aspect of her work are her performances and choreographies *Memòries d'una puça* [Memoirs of a flea] (2012), *Només són dones / Son solo mujeres* [They are only women] (2015) and *WW – We Women* (2015). A multidisciplinary adaptation of Carmen Domingo's unpublished script directed by Carme Portaceli and choreographed by Picó, *Només són dones* sets out to unearth the memories of the Spanish Republican female subject. The production premiered in 19 June 2015 in the theatre Josep Maria de Segarra (Santa Coloma de Gramanet) and developed its narrative from the interactions between Picó, the actress Miriam Iscla and the singer Maika Makosvki. The on-stage bodily dialogue established between the three artists has been described by Helena Buffery as a form of embodied protest: "through process of witnessing and inter(in)animating each other's performances, all three women become bodies of protest" (2017: 879). Picó's collaborative work *WW – We Women* (2015), on the other hand, is set in the contemporary world and posits a reflection on intercultural encounters and the present-day female condition. First shown at the Festival Grec (Mercat de les Flors) on 6 July 2015, *WW* features Picó performing alongside dancers and choreographers Julie Dossavi, Minako Seki and Shreyashee Nag bringing onto the stage different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as a variety of dancing styles and techniques.

Picó's concern with the socio-political body also underpins her earlier production *Memòries d'una puça*, premiered at the festival Temporada Alta in Salt (2012) and then at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya (TNC). Conceived in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2007-08 as a reflection on its effects on society and the arts, Picó and dancers Valentí Rocamora i Torà and Carles Fernández Fuentes embody the figure of the flea to roam amongst piles of residues and debris in what appears to be a post-apocalyptic world. As suggested by the titles of several of her other performances — *El llac de les mosques* [The Lake of the Flies] (2009), *Matar al bicho* [To Kill the Beasty] (2011) and *Petra, la mujer araña y el putón de la abeja Maya* [Petra, the spider-woman, and that slut, Maya, the bee] (2011) — Picó has long been interested in incorporating the realm of insects and arachnids in her shows. In her work, the insect is habitually associated with processes of transformation. She explains her attraction to this type of invertebrates in her production *One-Hit Wonders*,

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premiered at the Mostra d'Alcoi in 2014, where she commemorates twenty years of artistic production by revisiting some of her most iconic pieces ranging from the late 1990s to the early 2010s. In this show she interprets fragments of the performances: *D.V.A. (Dudoso valor artístic, 1999)* [Dubious Artistic Value]; *Bésame el cactus* [Kiss my cactus] (2000), *Paella Mixta* [Mixed Paella] (2004), *El Llac de les mosques* [The flies' lake] (2009) and *Memòries d'una puça* [Memoirs of a flea] (2012). The stage is sparsely furnished with three angular pedestals of different sizes, each plinth being indicative of the different identities that Picó is about to embody. As the spectacle opens, the dancer steps on top of one of the props and begins to flutter her hands and arms vigorously. No music accompanies her frantic motion; in fact, the only perceptible sounds are the ones generated by her rapid gestures, which are evocative of the movement patterns and vibrational noises made by insects. Picó steps in and out of different types of embodiments with ease and her insect-like motions are swiftly replaced by human gestures as she traverses effortlessly the borders between the human and the non-human. In her typically ironic tone the dancer from Alcoi addresses the audience and expresses her ongoing fascination with insects, praising their ability to adapt, mutate and survive in extreme environments, but also noting their rather ephemeral condition: "flies", she says, "have a twenty-four hour life span. So [...] that ever-present fly in your house, it is never the same one" (Picó 2017, my translation).

In this article, I explore the choreographic movements deployed in Picó's *Memòries d'una puça* as embodiments of structural social, political and economic systems through the figure of the parasite. Informed by the work of dance scholars Ann Cooper Albright (1997), Rudi Laermans (2015) and Jennifer Roche (2015) as well as Braidotti's posthuman concept of 'becoming insect' (2002), my analysis set out to read Picó's impure and promiscuous practices, her parasitical dancing activities and her embodiment of the insect as symptomatic of the collapse of the modern subject as well as the socio-political organism.

## **1. Theoretical intersections: becoming insect, the parasite, posthumanism, and dance**

In the comment above Picó might appear to be remarking the blatantly obvious, yet her words echo some of the key elements that Rosi Braidotti develops in her Deleuzian-inflected post-humanist theory of 'becoming insect'. Transformation, transience, and the subject's relationship with territory and his/her location with respect to "a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations" (2002, 122) are central to the philosophical nomadology proposed by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that serves Braidotti to speak about the dissolution of the "boundaries of classical subjectivity" (2002, 118). Taking into account the literary heritage of insects in European literature and their varied cultural coding, Braidotti (148) goes on to note how in present-day cultural production, these creatures are often read as symptomatic of society's fears and anxieties):

insects exacerbate the human power of understanding to the point of implosion. Tiny miniatures, they exercise the same immense sense of estrangement as dinosaurs, dragons or other gigantic monsters. Improbable morphological constructs, they challenge and titillate and are hybrid par excellence. (149)

Attentive to the crisis of humanism typified by postmodernism's decentring of dominant (masculine) models of subjectivity and basing her argument on Deleuze and Guattari's writings about the 'Body without Organs', described by the philosophers as one that "is not deficient; there is nothing lacking in it except the consent to be a proper organism" (Bruns 2007, 708), the feminist theorist sets out to demonstrate how "the process of becoming may not be sexually undifferentiated as Deleuze and Guattari suggest" (2002, 120).

Braidotti's pointing at the issue of sexual difference in processes of becoming is also relevant to the field of dance studies, insofar as it has been key to theoretical approaches to this still emerging academic discipline. Indeed, as the feminist scholar, dancer and choreographer Ann Cooper Albright notes, "dance — which is arguably one of the most extensive physical and intellectual cultural discourses of (about, on, with, for) the body — has received scant serious attention outside of its own scholarly community" (1997, 2). She observes how academic approaches to dance have traditionally been informed by theories of the 'male gaze', which have explored the ways in which women have been coded as 'objects-to-be-looked at', a concept formulated by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Albright goes on to state that "[m]ost of the readings [of dance] pointed out in gruesome details just how completely women's bodies had been written over (and their own desires written out) by the inevitable repressiveness built into cultural representations of the female body" (1997, xvii-xviii). While she acknowledges the value of spectatorship theory in the analysis of dance, the theorist and practitioner moves beyond this prism to argue that dance, as a moving art form, grants the opportunity to throw into disarray the cultural, political and social structures that regulate and legitimise certain modes of cultural representation, therefore, "embodied experience of dancing can provide a counter (and resistant) discourse to representation of the body *even while* creating those representations" (Albright 1997, 3). As such, dance can be regarded as an art practice that has the potential to feed off dominant culture in order to challenge and disturb the core structures that it reproduces. This aspect of dance can be linked to the figure of the parasite, famously described by Michel Serres (1982) as that which exists in-between a range of bodies, disciplines and structures. Following Serres' notion of the parasite, an organism that often takes the shape of an insect, the dancing body is understood as 'materialised discourse' (Laermans 2015, 54)— offers the possibility to intervene and change any system from within:

The parasite is an exciter. Far from transforming a system, changing its nature, its form, its elements, its relation and its pathways [...] It inclines it. It makes the equilibrium of the energetic distribution fluctuate. It dopes it. It irritates it. It inflames it. Often this inclination has no effect. But it can produce gigantic ones by chain reactions or reproduction. [...] The parasite intervenes, enters the system as an element of fluctuation. It excites it or incites it; it puts it into motion, or it paralyzes it. (191)

This subversive figure that moves across boundaries with such ease and comfortably settles in established habitats to interfere in and disrupt its core structures offers a useful perspective to analyse the ways in which Picó's dance productions engage with questions of social unease and traverse traditional spaces of (gendered) corporeal materiality, art and dance disciplines, and symbolic representation. However, as Braidotti reminds us, this traversing of spaces requires a connection with the environment, one that is central to the trope of the insect but that is also crucial to

the moving body: “[the] embodied subject is shot through with relational linkages of the symbiotic, contaminating/viral kind which interconnect it to a variety of others, starting from the environment or habitat” (2002, 122).

Focusing on the figure of the blood-feeding disrupting parasite, this article explores this relationship with regards to *Memòries d’una puça*. The dance show narrates the story of three fleas that find themselves in a world that has lost its shape. They roam a territory that has almost been wiped out of any social signifiers, holding hands and repeating the same sequence of footsteps. In their wanders the fleas come across a range of objects and products, the remnants of a consumer society (screens, mobile phones, junk food, billboards, old tyres, commercial advertisements and sports radio commentary) and an unkempt dustman who appears to be similarly adrift in this derelict world. The creatures are drawn to these abandoned items, TV advertisements, radio broadcasts and music, mischievously manipulating the discarded goods and mimicking in mockery the voices and gestures of a variety of renown characters from the music and sports industries (rock stars, football players and football commentators) as well as the attitudes and behaviours of the users and audiences of these commercial industries. In their playful embodied parodies their movements become exaggerated, their voices distorted and the laughter they emit echoey. In one occasion, images of their burlesque impersonations are broadcast in black and white on a screen that is placed at the back of the stage, ridiculing in their (re-)interpretations the mechanisms and tools deployed in the advertising and broadcasting industries. With their imitations they construct grotesque reproductions, caricatures, of the behaviours and habits associated with a consumerist society. After each instance of rapturous mockery, the creatures join hands again and reinitiate their core choreographic movements to continue wandering through a devastated environment where only the remnants of consumerism remain visible.

Trained in classical ballet, Spanish dance and contemporary dance, Picó’s practice both incorporates and undoes the core elements of each of these traditions. Her work not only trespasses the boundaries of classical dance, but it is also situated at the fringes of many other cultural activities such as theatre, literature, installation and the arts. As Francesc Massip (2012, 159) notes, she belongs to a generation of Catalan practitioners who practice ‘dance theatre’, a form of performance that integrates elements from a variety of disciplines, ranging from the theatre, the visual arts, Actionism, happenings, performance and body work. This interest in disturbing the borders of disciplines and genres is also echoed in her own dance movements and style, which evince an interest in transgressing the limits of gender, sexuality and the human.

## **2. Insect Becoming and the Moving Body**

In *Moving Together. Theorizing and Making Contemporary Dance*, Laermans reminds us of the cultural, political and gendered structures that are activated by the moving body of the dancer:

Like every human body, the dancer’s trained corporeality is not just an organic bundle of flesh and bones but a materialized discourse, a physicality that repeatedly signifies through its actions the alteration undergone from the general potential to move into a structured one. (2015, 54)

Without a doubt, in Laermans' words one can identify traces of Judith Butler's theory of the performative body, which argues that the iteration of gestures and acts produces the effect of an intelligible and gender-coded material substance. For Butler (1999), gender, political, social and cultural discourses shape the body's surface to the point of rendering these corporealities signifiers of the systems in which they are produced. Following Butler, Laermans observes that the body of a dancer bears the imprints of prescriptive and hegemonic, namely heterosexual, gender narratives. With regards to femininity she notes how "[t]he average female body choreographed by the dominant gender script actively rehearses the many corporeal acts that signify femininity" (106). The culture/body association is also noted by Albright, who argues that what is particular of the dancing body is its condition of being caught in-between body formation. In Butlerian terms, this refers to the iteration and consequent activation of normative notions of corporeality but also to the ideal notions, form, and surface of the performing body, namely, the body as spectacle. In the words of the dance theoretician, corporeality is "[i]nherently unstable, the body is always in a paradoxical process of becoming – and becoming undone" (Albright 1997, 5).

Most theoretical approaches to the configuration of the body written in the last two decades tend to agree on defining corporeality as a material site where nature and culture encounter, in other words, bodies are organic and malleable surfaces that are codified into particular cultural, political and gendered signifiers. The implications of this view in relation to dance are clear, for example, the mannerist artificiality of a dancer who has been trained in classical ballet illustrates this process of dominance and control of matter. As Laermans notes: "Its mechanically moving upright body originates in the early-modern aristocratic culture of the royal courts, which valued the civilized formality of an artificial posture" (2015, 57). Contemporary dance has challenged the polished graciousness, the well-considered steps and the measured pace of a trained ballet dancer and exploited instead the movements that emerge from within the cracks and faults of culture and nature. In this respect, the insect — often a parasite — and always a transgressor of corporeal boundaries and structures, is a useful figure to explore the doing and undoing of cultural identity in the dancing of Picó. In what follows, I argue that Picó's recurring embodiments of the insect can be read as fluctuations between structural systems but also as a means to draw attention to the artificial quality of processes of culturalization. This activation and deactivation of social, cultural and gendered modes of being is best exemplified through the concept of animal-becoming, developed by Braidotti yet originally formulated by Deleuze and Guattari, who state:

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs. (1986, 13)

However, this process of becoming, as Braidotti reminds us, "has nothing to do with imitating the sounds of animals or insects" (2002: 157), since this would simply lead to "mimetic staticity" (157). Alternatively, for the feminist theorist this is a mode of being that "steals and runs" (157), in other words, it is concerned with capturing the essence of the animal, the insect, or the parasite and dislodging it from its constraining socio-political habitat to engage in a process of transformation. In Picó's *Memòries d'una puça*, the dancers bodies unfold in a spatial and temporal continuum and in their embodiments of insects, parasites and excitors, to recall Serres'

concept, they collapse notions of that which is culturally and socially intelligible. The gestures and movements of the dancers activate simultaneously notions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, classical and popular ideas of the danceable but they also incorporate elements that are outside the remit of the discipline, merging legitimate and illegitimate dancing and non-dancing traditions. In so doing, they enter in dialogue with a wide range of popular culture and media: music, film, sport, advertising, broadcasting and the fashion and beauty industries. Here, Picó engages in an exercise of cultural and disciplinary cross-contamination and it is the trope of the insect that allows her the traversing of these boundaries. Recalling Braidotti’s definition of the animal-becoming notion but also Albright’s Butlerian approach to dance studies, in the next section I set out to show how in their doing and redoing of patterned choreographies and their frequent parodic embodiments of consumer lifestyle, the creatures that Picó and her dancing companions incarnate and perform on stage unashamedly *steal* habitual cultural, social and consumer practices to simply to *run* riot and interpret them anew. In *Memòries d’una puça*, this subversive process of transformation takes place in close relation to the habitat as the three main characters roam, explore and become reacquainted with a wounded post-apocalyptic landscape.

### 3. Charting cartographies: re-mapping a wounded geo-cultural terrain

*Memòries d’una puça* opens with three dim figures standing unsteadily on one leg, their position being suggestive of their readiness to take a first step. Their bodies are in a straight line, facing the audience, and their torsos and heads are somewhat bent over. They tremble slightly as they try to hold their balance slowly alternating the leg on which they stand. With the stage still in semi-darkness the song *Over the Rainbow*, written for the 1939 classic fantasy film *The Wizard of Oz* and famously interpreted by Judy Garland, starts playing. In the background, the shadow of an Osborne bull is projected onto a wavering and ragged white curtain. The bull’s black silhouette refers to the massive metal-frame billboards advertising the Osborne wine cellar’s brandy that peppered many Spanish hilltops and roadsides during the years of the Franco dictatorship (1939-75). These giant figures crystallised the regime’s notion of a virile, traditional and single-party nation and were also an indicator of the economic prosperity following the harsh post-war period that signalled the beginning of the age of consumerism. This symbol of masculinity and Spanishness still remains deeply embedded in the nation’s consciousness and despite having been removed from most of its topography, the silhouette of the bull continues to find its way into present-day consumer goods, like t-shirts, mugs and key rings, as well as national symbols such as the Spanish flag. In *Memòries d’una puça*, this emblem of Francoism’s idea of a unified socio-political and geographical nation about to crash into smithereens. Just below the ruins of this powerful animal, the three fragile and shabbily dressed creatures continue to stand still in a world devoid of specific cultural and national symbols. Unaware of the collapse of the bull, the figures firmly hold hands in a gesture of union but also of vigilance and preparadness to roam this unwelcoming wasteland. As the soundtrack gradually comes to an end, the three fleas begin to engage in a rather mechanical form of dance, repeating systematically a sequence of movements, accelerating their pace and slowing it down, falling over only to rise to their feet again, the only discernable sound being that of their footsteps. Suddenly, the stage is filled with empty cans and the opening tune is played again. The figures continue repeating the same choreographic movements yet as their feet come into contact with the piles

of scattered metal containers they generate a variety of rattling sound effects or noises. Upon observing the dustman using a golf club to hit the discarded cans, the fleas interrupt their routine and begin to run around amongst the rubbish, kicking the cans playfully, revelling in the chaos of the debris only to join hands again and persevere retracing the terrain in their patterned pace. In the course of their journey through this devastated land, this regular sequence of movements will be frequently interspersed by instances of rapturous play, exaggerated dance moves and parodic mimicry of consumer habits and popular culture. There will be many instances when one (or all) of the creatures would fall on the floor and move its legs spasmodically to die and be reborn again.

In *Memòries d'una puça*, the creatures interpret their core choreography with suppleness and ease. Picó and her two male dancing companions hold hands and move in synchrony as they map out a debris-ridden derelict landscape. The charting of a cartography of their new environment through their moving bodies is significant, specially, as it is carried out by the figure of the insect. Braidotti's explanation of the Deleuzian notion of the framing of territory is useful to unpack the animal/movement/territory relationship and its links with post-human modes of being that situate the human in a continuum with the animal:

In order to mark, code, possess or frame their territory, animals produce signals and signs constantly [...]. They are immanent to their gestures aimed at coping with needs and environments. In the process of recognising, coding and coping they transcend their sheer animality, joining up with the human in an effort of expressing, inhabiting and protecting their territory. Orienting oneself in a strange territory; finding food and water, let alone a mate, expressing all this so that the others in the collective pack or group can get the idea – that is a model of radical immanence that needs to be revalued. It is non-verbal communication at its best (2002, 133)

In Picó's show, dance — as a form of “non-verbal communication” — functions as a means to “mark, code, possess or frame their territory” (133). Laermans reminds us that any form of dance, traditional or contemporary, acts as “a normatively binding symbolic order that incorporates one or more body ideals existing within the surrounding culture, together with their allowances and constraints, their do's and don'ts” (58). Indeed, as Butler has shown, bodily actions are determined by political, cultural and gender discourses. As Albright has stated following Butler's theoretical framework it could be argued that the ephemeral gestures produced by a body, in this case the body of a dancer, can both activate and rewrite notions of its own coded materiality, that is to say, the iterations of the dancing body can assert the ways in which corporeality is inscribed in hegemonic and normalising discourses but they can also allude to or subvert the systems' own prohibitions and taboos.

In the same way as these three parasites inhabit, roam and redraw this chaotic landscape by repeating and reinterpreting the same movements, I have situated Picó's embodiment of the insect in relation to a web of theoretical approaches. In what follows, I will mostly centre my analysis on the dancers performance of core choreographic moves and suggest that in their doings and undoings of these patterned movements they act-out the notion of animal/insect becoming. It is for this reason that I am now turning my attention to critical analysis of choreographic systems and their function in *Memòries d'una puça*.

#### 4. Choreography in context: the temporal and spatial location of the dancing body

The word choreography has its roots in the Greek *choreia* (dance) and the French *graphie* (writing) and referred originally to the written accounts of dance (Kraut 2010, 38). It was not until the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries that the term began to be used in reference to the writing of sequences of dance movements (38). Highly influenced by the importance granted to the choreographer in traditional European ballet, the development of modern dance in the 1920s and 1930s continued to place a strong emphasis on the formulae of moves and their association with the idiosyncratic style of its creator rather than on the dancer's performance or physical interpretation (38). The role and importance granted to the choreographer as the mastermind behind the dancer's method and technique dates back to the early twentieth century and, more specifically, to Diaghilev's Ballet Russes (1909-29) (Roche 2015, 2). This insistence on and prominence of authorship has imbued the term choreographer with a pervasive sense of privilege (Kraut 2010, 40). Contemporary dance theorists have contested this view and have begun to explore approaches that understand choreography in relational terms. According to the choreographer and creative researcher Carol Brown, choreography materialises, albeit transitorily, at the moment of performance when it emerges as a "matrix of relationships shaped by states of flux between the body and the built, performers and audience, corporeality and virtuality, ephemerality and the seemingly permanent" (2010, 58). In the same vein, Dance Studies scholar, Jennifer Roche, has examined the categorisation of choreography in academic discourse and argued that it has generally been "prioritised as the site of meaning above the materiality of dancers who embody and realise the work" (2015, 2). She explains that choreographic works have traditionally been favoured for their role in the construction of the history of the discipline. Unlike the performing body and the transient quality of dance itself, choreographies, as scripts of moving narratives, are records that can be stored. Drawing on Dianna Taylor's work on the archive and the repertoire, Roche (2-3) notes the difficulties of acknowledging the dancing body as a site of knowledge: "Dance suffers due to its ephemeral nature; it does not leave a written document behind, but can only enter the archive through video documentation or dance notation" (2). Dancers bodies have been seen to bear the imprints of their choreographers in their technique, posture and presentation but also in the themes and structural patterns deployed during a performance.

In the course of the 1960s, the question of choreography and its effects on the dancer's body began to be challenged by practitioners and choreographers themselves, the influential and innovative work of Merce Cunningham being illustrative of this shift. The dancer and choreographer defended the "destabilisation of authorial intention in his choreography through his use of chance operations in creative decision-making" (4). Cunningham's own practice and views (among others) have endured and have helped refocus the field of dance studies by accounting for corporeality, movement and the senses (5). To date, choreographic systems and techniques still remain under scrutiny because of the ways in which they continue to codify both movement and the body. Theoretical approaches in the 1990s became more inclusive of alternative modes of dance and terms such as "body eclectic" and "hybrid bodies" began to be used to describe the dancing practices that were developing at the periphery of established choreographic systems and styles (Roche 2015, 9). Similarly, these new practitioners were regarded as "art researchers" for the



ways in which they developed new moving languages by means of exploring theoretical concepts, the sentient body, its emotions and sensations (9). As Davida indicates (1992 in Roche 2015, 9) “[the] pluralism, present at every level of new dance activity, is creating dialogue between previously separate ideas, styles, medium and milieu. Boundaries are being crossed and hybrid forms emerging” (9). This turn to somatic and sensory experience in dance is characteristic of the noughties performances and academic discourses and part of the process of re-assessing questions of embodiment. Nowadays, while there is a consensus among practitioners and theorists to understand dancing bodies as the effects of “the systems they practice” (Roche 2015, 11), the promiscuous nature of the contemporary dancer, as he or she traverses canonical notions of the danceable, integrates extraneous art forms and embodies multiple shapes it is also acknowledged. Roche proposes to examine how dancers undo the organisational structures that they embody and the multiplicity of selves they inhabit through Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the Body without Organs. This is a form of being that favours the dismantling of the structural principles that arrange bodies into formulaic – “stratified” in Deleuzian terms – and localised notions of identity, it is a body “opposed to the organization of the organs called the organism” (158). For Roche, this state of being “supports an exploration of contemporary dancing practices that rupture the paradigm of the choreographer and dancer as singular and separate molar entities” (2015, 100). Roche’s reading of the dancing body through the Body without Organs also echoes Brown’s understanding of dance practise and in particular, the ways in which the dancing body engages with space and audiences alike. She notes:

the threshold between inside and outside, interior and exterior is a complex enfolding as we embody, incorporate and extrude spaces, assimilating given places through somatic awareness of interior and exterior spaces and audiences can follow this movement like a Möbius strip; in rotating the undersides of corporeal surfaces; in (dis)embodying narratives of place; in measuring space through sequencing bodily articulations; in mapping body parts to points in space; in extruding lines; in shifting scale; in changing orientations; in hollowing volumes; in inscribing geometries; in drawing spaces; and in spiralling dimensions. (2010, 59)

Brown’s description of dance places an emphasis on the ways in which movement enables the opening of the body to space, feeding of its peculiarities and incorporating them. It follows that in the course of this intimate interactions the space that is being mapped out by the dancing body is altered, albeit temporarily, and becomes the locus of embodied experience. The body/space reciprocity that is established through dance is useful to read the dancers choreographic movements in their re-mapping of the terrain in *Memòries d’una puça*. This is a relationship that harks back to Braidotti’s explanation of how the animal marks, codes and possesses territory (2002, 133) but also to the feminist theorist’s notion of the posthuman, who argues that the relocation of the human body in a continuum with the animal/insect and the landscape is symptomatic of the collapse of notions of classical subjectivity, whereby the *male* subject becomes decentered, displaced.

The performance’s opening sequence of movements, or choreography, is re-enacted at different moments during the show; however, in each of these instances the steps, gestures, rhythms and emphasis are reproduced slightly different. Therefore, each time that the choreography is performed, the dancers generate numerous deviations from what could be termed as the original (normative) script. Each iteration of the ‘standard pattern’ is injected with a different meaning. Normally, these slight

mutations occur as the creatures develop new relationships with an environment that is also changing, their movements and patterns are constantly being actualised in an effort to adapt, recover, or even repossess the territory. In this performance, this process of reinscription is also established through music and sound. In the show's opening scene there is certain level of reservedness or restraint, even stiffness, in the bodies and movements of the three characters as they begin their exploration of this desolate place. However, their attitude changes as the environment, and the music, turn more and more chaotic and intense. The stage gradually fills with debris and the creatures begin to interact playfully with all the litter and discarded items that are scattered around the place, shrieking with laughter as they move emphatically to the repetitive soundtrack. They iterate the 'original script of movements' yet their gestures are amplified; they become more extravagant and unconstrained. The initial structure of the choreographic sequence is interspersed with new and lavish movements or deviations of the 'standard choreography'. The three bodies start to revel in the disorder and messiness of the place and, in consequence, the 'master steps' they have been systematically performing loosen up progressively and the opening choreographic narrative becomes more and more diffuse. Their movements are evocative of those of an insect as it moves from one object to another, lured by the intensity and variety of smells, colours and shapes that one could find in any rubbish heap.

In *Memòries d'una puça*, the dancers perform the story of three small and insignificant creatures clinging to life in a derelict and unstructured environment. Picó has spoken about the flea in terms its dependence on other live organisms for its survival and as a metaphor for the crossing over (physical and geographical) boundaries: "Es un parásito que chupa la sangre de los demás y que salta de uno a otro. Y nosotros también chupamos la energía de los otros para aferrarnos a la vida, para impulsarnos hacia adelante, saltando de cuerpo en cuerpo" (Picó in Barranco, 2013) [It is a parasite that sucks the blood of others and jumps from one being to another. We also suck the energy of others to cling to life, to propel ourselves forward, jumping from one body to another]. Most reviews of Picó's *Memòries d'una puça* have, quite rightly, framed her embodiment of the flea as a critique to the 2007-08 global economic crisis and its repercussions for Spanish society, economy and the arts. However, analysis of the dance structure and form in this performance require attention as they physically enact a deconstruction of discourses of power. Choreography read alongside the parasite motif – understood in Serres terms as that which feeds off normative structures to corrupt them – is useful to situate Picó's *Memòries d'una puça* in a broader critical context which accounts for the critique and transformation of the economic systems and commercial strategies that control, structure and normalise contemporary society, politics and identity.

In *Memòries d'una puça* 'the norm' is symbolised through the traces of traditional notions of dance (classical dance, Spanish and contemporary dance) that are being deployed by the three creatures as they chart out this devastated land. With every movement that they generate as the show develops, the core choreographic sequence is being redrafted, pushed to its own limits. Reading these phenomena through Butler's notion of the performativity of gender (and identity), as dance scholars Laerman and Albright suggest, is useful to understand how this performance redraws dance style categories. Indeed, while Butler's theory focuses primarily on the construction of gender and sexuality, her understanding of bodies as materialised discourses enables us to analyse how *Memòries d'una puça* addresses questions of standardisation of categories of dance, gender, society but also of what it means to be

human. Before doing so, let's return to her concept of gender performativity, if only briefly. When the feminist philosopher defines gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (1999: 43-4), she is interested in demonstrating the effects that normative discourses on gender identity have on the contours of the body. She also reminds us that in this continuous process of signification, bodies not only materialise as affirmations of normative structures but can also foreground the fragility of their own cultural, political and historical groundings.

In *Memòries d'una puça*, with the constant repetition of the same scheme of movements, gestures and actions, which assert corporeally distinct categories of the genre, the dancers produce deviations from the pattern that do not conform to the standards of purity of the discipline itself. More than this, their embodiment of the insect/parasite enables the performers to incorporate and move across identities, spaces, dance categories, and 'high' and 'low' art forms. In their charting out of the terrain, their bodies and the space they trace become undone and reconstituted again in ways that are evocative of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the Body without Organs, for they not only present a socio-cultural body that has imploded but also a social and geo-political organism that no longer functions under the same organising and normative dynamics. According to Braidotti, the "insect-becoming" quality foregrounds questions of sexual difference. The feminist theorist argues that the insect — as abject and "border-line figure" (2002, 150) — shares many structural elements with the feminine and notes that the recurrence of this motif in contemporary cultural production is indicative of "the decentering of anthropocentrism" (2002, 149). Accordingly, Braidotti, situates the insect at the threshold of the post-human, as a figure that contests the privileged status and location granted to humans in relation to other species (animals and plants) and objects (technical and virtual). This aspect of the insect is key to the narrative structure of Picó's dystopian narrative, insofar as her corporeal exploration of the parasite brings to the fore questions about how bodies, as seemingly coherent materialised discourses, have the power intervene in, colonise and undo the any type of corporeal, social, political and economic structure.

As the performance draws to a close Picó, who is now wearing a swimsuit, dives into the sea. In the meantime, amidst the sounds of the waves that engulf the theatre, the scaffolding that had held the Osborne bull billboard is being knocked down. Significantly, Picó is to find herself inside a bottle, another dispensable object of a society that is based on mass production and consumption. Perhaps, the bottle might function as a protective envelope that will take the parasite to a new environment, yet there is a more sinister reading to this ending, as the flea has become trapped and absorbed by the debris that litters this world and become yet another of its residues, unable to move, dislocated, and most certainly adrift.

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