

# DANCE IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

Corpo Máquina is a unique collaboration between choreographer Guilherme Miotto and youth worker Amine Mbarki. In their foundation's statutes, the two commit explicitly to creating art works based in a social component. A story of inclusivity set in Tilburg-Noord.

'Cultural diversity' is one of those subjects that intermittently make headlines, only to sink back after a while into the swamp of issues that do deserve our attention, but not right now, because there are others that take priority. Currently it is high up on the list, alongside 'cultural inclusivity'. 'Inclusivity' is the latest in a string of terms to express the government's ambitions to make the cultural field more pluriform,' according to an editorial in Boekman 115, devoted entirely to the transition Naar een inclusief cultuurbeleid (Towards inclusive cultural policies). Or, you might say, to make the field more diverse. 'Inclusivity' indicates the aspiration to not exclude anyone wrongfully. Inclusivism has been adopted at ministerial level, which is reflected locally. One example is PACT Utrecht, a network of cultural producers committed to D&I – Diversity & Inclusivity.

So for the moment, diversity and inclusivity have everything going for

them. Still, Marjorie Boston, director of Rightaboutnow Inc., is 'wary of the future', as she put it when she was interviewed by Simon van den Berg in Theatermaker, September 2018. 'I'm still more or less waiting for that moment when it all goes down the drain again. And I'm thinking of ways to make sure that when it happens, this huge community is not left out once again. Which means there's a few things we must push forward with: we must continue to guide and educate new artists. Transfer. Tell our own story. And we need a place of our own.'

A dedicated place for an artistic community that is often barred from regular cultural circles. One such place – with its own story to tell – is Corpo Máquina, founded in September 2017 by choreographer Guilherme Miotto and Amine Mbarki, a youth worker with the Tilburg-based welfare provider R-Newt. A combination that is not as weird as it would seem at first

sight. Amine's work area is the problem neighbourhood Tilburg-Noord. Guilherme grew up in another problem neighbourhood in Brazil – although a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Tilburg hardly compares to a favela. He was introduced to dance through a social project, a circus that came to perform in his neighbourhood and that offered free admission, and much needed coaching from three youth workers, to children. Having been introduced to different dance styles in Brazil, Guilherme received a scholarship to go and study classical dance in Perm, Russia, at age fifteen. Ever since then, he has been living and working in Europe; in the Netherlands for the last twenty years. For a number of those, he was a dancer with Emio Greco/Pieter C. Scholten and Krisztina de Châtel. He now lives in Breda, where the foundation is also established.

Guilherme and Amine have known each other for about fifteen years. Tilburg is home to the now world famous breakdance-crew The Hustle Kids, which was supported by R-Newt and its predecessors from its inception. Amine was the one who introduced Guilherme to the hiphop scene in the province of Noord-Brabant, which led to the solo Rise up! for world champion Hustle Kid Menno van Gorp in 2015, and more. It was the start of an ongoing process of entwining (dance)art and welfare work that led to the decision to marry the two in a joint foundation, so far, a singular occurrence within the Dutch cultural field.

The double origins of Corpo Máquina are reflected in its objectives. In the neutral prose of the statutes: 'making professional dance/performance-productions; making social-artistic productions, if possible, in conjunction/collaboration with target groups; realising hybrid projects (artistic crossovers



with [...] partners from various fields of art and/or other sectors.' These may be accompanied by workshops and on-site 'interventions' with local participants.

This 'realisation' of hybrid projects began some time before *Corpo Máquina* was established, in the shape of a production called *Warriors Foot* which premiered on 29 October 2016 during *Tilburg Cultuurnacht*. Guilherme Miotto and Amine Mbarki made a show with fourteen young freestyle street football players from Tilburg-Noord, aged 10 to 13. Its main attraction was 'footballing wizard' Nasser El Jackson, elected best freestyle football player in 2012 and winner of an online tournament in 2013. 20-year old Nasser, born and raised in Tilburg-Noord, had grown into a role model for his freestyling young neighbours. Clearly, *Warriors Foot* was an example of a social-artistic production as described

in the *Corpo Máquina* statutes, 'realised in conjunction/collaboration' with a target group: the street football players from Tilburg and their friends and families. The idea had been prompted by Amine; Guilherme, coming from a footballing family like Nasser, immediately warmed to it.

*Corpo Máquina* is an association founded on inclusivity. Although he isn't a hip hopper himself, Guilherme Miotto does have a strong affinity with admires their drive and independence. In the first production that was presented under the *Corpo Máquina* moniker, *Even worse*, in August 2017, two of the three dancers – Shane Boers and Simon Bus – had a background in hip hop, while the third – Evangelos Biskas V – came from Fontys Dance Academy. Another production, *Portraits*, saw five female fourth-year Fontys students in *Theatre Dance /Jazz Urban* respond to five young former

inmates and vice versa. Guilherme likes to work on several planes at once: professional-artistic alongside social-artistic, urban alongside academic – with an eye to future hybrid productions.

## **BALL**

The street football champion from Tilburg-Noord, now 23, ambassador for the Dutch football association KNVB and sponsored by Adidas, who has amassed 60,000 followers on Instagram, is left to his own devices in *Corpo Máquina's* latest production: *Ball*. *Ball* is announced as a 'theatrical show for football artist Nasser El Jackson'. On stage, Nasser offers a demonstration of the same feats he presents during his showcases for football audiences, but stretched across a longer time span – up to an hour. Long enough for all the pomp and circumstance to



fall away, stripping the hotshot miracle worker with a ball down to a paragon of exhaustion. As Wendy Lubberding wrote in her review on Theaterkrant.nl: 'And so, in the end, it is a human figure facing the audience after all, a man condemned to plodding along in front of all the others and for whom giving up is not an option.'

Nasser himself says he has learned a lot from training for Ball. It was by no means an effortless process. Although Nasser and Guilherme share a passion for football, they came together from radically different environments: the art world and what Amine describes as the 'concrete jungle' of Tilburg-Noord. It necessitated a translation of Guilherme's artistic concepts to Nasser's frame of thought, which Amine, who has known Nasser from an early age, provided.

Corpo – the body – takes centre stage in Guilherme's artistic concepts – naturally so, as dance exists but by the grace of the human physique. In Ball the body is in the spotlight, relentlessly so, as a vulnerable machine for survival, it is being put to the test, like a young warrior in a tribal rite of passage. Guilherme considers the body responsible for the image we have of the world we inhabit. The body has an 'embedded cognition' at its disposal, stored memories and experiences. 'You must think with the whole body.'

Movement and dance are forms for the body to turn its intentions into actions. A realisation which, in Corpo Máquina's view, is not without major consequences: 'Corpo Máquina is convinced there is a dancer hidden away inside everyone and that this dancer is capable of tearing down walls, overturning partitions and break open set interpersonal forms and relationships.' Guilherme himself uses terms as suggestive as 'inner realities' and 'instinctive landscapes' and refers to the 'need to create out of an inner experience context'. It is his way of describing the method he has been developing since 2006 and that can be used both by artists and in training contexts. The method is called Instinctive Performance, but what it entails cannot easily be deduced from the available interviews and written statements.

Back to the floor. The founders of Corpo Máquina are surrounded by a working community of people who are permanently or temporarily involved in its projects and productions in various ways. Coaching takes a prominent position: passing on the knowledge you have gathered, goes without saying, as is common practice within the hip-hop scene. Guilherme Miotto himself teaches at Fontys Dance Academy and Maastricht Institute of Performative Art. The projects generate workshops and training programmes.

How far along is Corpo Máquina on the road to an inclusive cultural policy? An 'inclusive cultural policy' means no-one may be denied access or excluded from participating in culture based on skin colour, age, sex, social status or any other unwarranted criterium. And taking part in culture, in whatever form, is an aspect of welfare.

Corpo Máquina creates productions – as opposed to acting as a conduit for things made by others. It commits itself to realising two kinds of dance and performance productions. The professional productions serve to further the discipline, the social-artistic ones use artistic means to reach a social goal. The ultimate aim is to let the two 'streams' flow into one. The company isn't there yet, but a step has been taken towards an inclusive cultural landscape. Taking to the stage has opened a new dimension for Nasser, that's for sure.

And the defining aspect to Corpo Máquina is that in their founding statute, choreographer and welfare worker explicitly commit to creating art works based in a social component. Which is why Corpo Máquina deserves the attention of policy makers.

The developments won't take away all of Marjorie Boston's worries. But perhaps it will be encouraging to see others working in the same vein. This is what it is all about, as Guilherme Miotto said in an interview: 'What matters to me is that an environment is generated wherein everyone involved feels free to engage and be creative.'

.Ball can be seen on 17/1 (Theater Kikker, Utrecht) and 18/1 (AINSI, Maastricht) as well as during the Corpo Máquina Society Weeks in Tilburg (29 April) and Breda (4 May)