

De Keersmaeker, *Fase*

To end at the beginning

Shaaron Boughen

Fase

Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker
Festival Theatre, March 14

piano phase. two figures real. three shadows projected. pale grey bell-shaped shifts swell under a horizontal plane of swinging arms and pivoting feet. white light. white sneakers. short white socks. very neat. incessant piano music shifts silently—a slippery move. De Keersmaeker and De Mey respond or preempt with subtle shifts of energy. it's mesmerising, concentrated, unadulterated. a corridor now lit with the swing of arms: still horizontal. just further downstage. identical bodies find fluid suspensions in pedestrian moves catching live space between the notes. cerebral process it may be but flying bobs mirror floating skirts. you can't deny the visual. add a leg gesture. the territory shifts again. a head goes with the arm then against the arm. the horizontal rotates shockingly to a vertical, a diagonal but back to the cover of the horizontal. downstage further again. stillness swings with movement. quiet prompts between the dancers remain personal. they retrace their journey to end where they began.

blackness. sighs of relief from suspended breath. Reich can be very insistent stuff.

come out. they came, sitting on close stools under honey lamplight. neat leather boots. angled arms in shirts. hand flicking hair into next gesture. arms race a circular path, trace a memory in the space. seats pivot on seats. symmetry becomes mirrored. momentary personalised contact caught inside square floor

light. recognition, awareness, knowingness. new notion of formalised duet through mechanistic actions. fists clenched in defiant ending.

blessed blackness. *violin phase.* De Keersmaeker slowly emerges into our consciousness in a pool of light defined by steppings with arms rotating about her torso. it's sensual, dignified, just simple virtuosity. she playfully carves the encompassed space. hips twist—was that a tango moment. the skirt whips up, is lifted up. she likes that. delightful repetitions humour our pleasure. snatched finish on the music again

more black—it's silence is lively and connected to the past and the future. *clapping music.* horizontal window of light on screen. costume and lighting fuse elements of the last 3 sections. was there a lighting state missed—what was

that look for. was it for me, the audience, or was something amiss. mystery. two travel diagonally downstage to end in mellow lamplight. one vigorously chasing the other backwards—a spatial challenge!

No matter how minimalist this work might be the development throughout the 4 sections is sophisticated and clever, remaining closely aligned to Steve Reich's musical structures and constrained variations which edge each other out of the foreground continually. Postmodernist choreographer Lucinda Child's collaborations with Phillip Glass in the late 70s explored the geometric construction of the body both spatially and temporally but had none of the finesse and sense of humanity of this work. So there are shades and shades of a colour and *Fase* remains significant both in its historical context as well as its contemporary interest.

There may be no emphasis of gender, no characterisation, no context, only the self-referential content of the movement vocabulary and our own urges to read meaning into the writing of the bodies in the space. The visual settings are simple, spare, architecturally alive, the colour a palette of husky monotoned grey and yellows. So this is what a talented 22 year old produces at the start of her career. Bring on *I said I* say I.

One gets to the next slightly

Linda Marie Walker

Fase

Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker & Rosas

Festival Theatre, March 14

Fase (Phase): four movements to the music of Steve Reich. A work 18 years old and performed only once at this festival by the choreographer, Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, and Michèle Anne De Mey. A tense work, tiring to watch, in its nowhere-to-hide—precise repetitive small moves—style. Tiring because of its relentless repetition, its going over the same movement again and again, not to 'teach' you but to insist on its language—as Reich insists on the minimal (often hard) structure of his music. After a while you begin to doubt your understanding of what is exactly there, as one does after looking at a word for an extended time (said George).

The beauty and excitement of *Fase* is its making of 4 spatial scenes, as if space is produced incrementally, as if it is always (in the end) in the moving-body. There is little to look at, except the height and width of the stage, and light—and the difficult pleasure of bodies performing for the sake of dance—not for the telling of a story with dance. Dance for dance, the dance of dance.

The pleasure is dance itself, or a particular type of dance which 'builds' a world by geometric and sensual fragments. A spatial pleasure which opens up inside one, a presence which is personal and startling (as one returns from some stray thought to find the dancers still there, dancing in one's absence): "Taken to its extreme, the pleasure of space leans towards the poetics of the unconscious, to the edge of madness." (Bernard Tschumi)

The relationship between De Keersmaecker's choreography and the music is close without being illustrative or subservient. There's a similar strength, like a holding pattern, in both forms; they leave each other alone. This I liked, as it assisted the time (timing, as beat, rhythm) of the space-becoming (becoming an experience of strange-fates, of fateful-events). The body was machinic, yet couldn't become robotic, it stayed too human, slightly off-balance now and then, enough to draw one's attention to effort, work,

and 'now'. Within deliberate repetition is the dilemma of habit, or a naming of habit, as the effects of our own time alive surface, like a scent: is this how my living looks, arms flailing, head snapping, and sudden repose, like a tiny interlude of almost-sleep, then frantic action again (while sitting in a chair) doesn't matter, up, down, same constant arrival 'nowhere' (or slightly over there): arrival takes its time, a long time, and then it's over, all is changed. In real time, black stage, a few words projected large: 'VIOLIN PHASE', for instance.

Violin Phase, the third movement, is a solo work. A circle of light on the stage, the dancer's domain. A circling, lyrical, phase, which edged toward abandon, only to withdraw, and fade, a kind of promise which was never going to be fulfilled. The light constant, keeping movement safe.

The final phase: *Clapping Music*. The sound of hands beating together, and primarily danced by the feet. The feet clapping the floor, the bodies slowly moving toward the 2 suspended lights from the second phase (*Come Out*). Arriving there just in time for the end of the music. Phase 4 reaching back to remember phase 2 (which was all arms). These unannounced symmetries laying quietly beneath appearances, like grammar. There were others. Like the use of light as set—the stage fully lit for the first movement (and spot-lit to make the merged shadows sharp), then moving with the dancers to the front of the stage (and back again); the rectangle of light in phase 4 a counter to the circle in phase 3. The constant use of arms in the first 3 phases, completely subdued in phase 4. Making the body appear much more hinged (making balance look like falling, and bringing the arms to the fore retrospectively).

Arrangements, like words, are orders. We arrange words, produce habits. Often with repetition we are displaced, out of our element, uncomfortable—excessive repetition is a way to make an outside (when despair turns silent, we are not happier, it's just the beginning; noise is breathing, that sort of thing). Being out of one's element is to recall the fact of inhabiting, we see the outside, newly arranged, and we are juxtaposed, instead of harmonised. So, we are alone, peeled off from habit-world, outside the inside of a moment.

In some way *Fase* was dance on the outside of an imagined inside, and to see it we had to come outside too, adrift. And, it might be that there wasn't even an inside, imagined or real.

The 4 phases looked like this to me: *Piano Phase*: Dance For Plains (for the plains of Gerald Murnane: "And then word came that the plains had settled for peach."); *Come Out*: Dance For Waiting (for the men of Maurice Blanchot's infinite conversation: "This is a sentence of a somewhat enigmatic turn."); *Violin Phase*: Dance For Round Things (for the things of Jean-Luc Nancy: "One and one and one."); *Clapping Music*: Dance For Artists (for the music of John Cage: "One more idea and then I am through."). The End.