

Moving Uncertainties: Negotiating 'Theatre in Movement' and Field-work Research in the French Context

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Abstract

Escale is a travelling physical theatre company based in France. For most of the past twenty years, its members have lived in caravans and performed in a marquee, bringing experimental performances to rural areas. Their itinerant lifestyle and artistic choices do not only situate them in the margins of the French theatrical landscape, but also in a terminological gap, as 'physical theatre' does not exist as a genre in France in the same way that it does in the UK. Therefore, to create and promote its work, Escale negotiates several disciplines and vocabularies. Such terminological uncertainty also influences my position as a researcher: it raises questions about the translation of a vocabulary developed in one context, and its adaptability to a similar practice in a different context. There does not yet exist in French an adequate lexicon for the kind of physical theatre that Escale practices. As a researcher, this has forced me to question the relationship I have with French, my mother tongue. The position of the researcher as an ethnographer, the influence of physical labour on my relationship with and approach to Escale, as well as the ethics of friendship and dialogue between researcher and artist are also issues generated by Escale's position in transitional zones, in-between disciplines, in-between identities.

Physical Theatres in the French context: Negotiating Marginalised Identities.

The stage is divided by three walls of plexiglass. On either side, a couple is dancing, each mirroring the other. From where the camera stands, the couples appear symmetrically on each side of

the fine line created by the plexiglass walls. The women grab their partners by the chin, passing an arm around the back of their necks. In this position, looking at the men's faces, they direct their partners and walk toward the camera, in a line parallel to the walls. An instant later, the couples have returned to where they started. The women stand two metres away from the walls, their backs turned to the plexiglass. The men stand behind them. They pass an arm around the women's waists, and hold tightly so that their bodies touch their partners.' They push a leg backward, wrapping their free arm around the women's throats. Holding their partners, they turn and swing them slightly to face the wall. They hold a minute, as if looking at the reflection in a mirror, rather than at another couple. At this moment, an image of a brick wall is projected onto the stage, and onto the male performers' bodies. The contours of the bricks cover the surface of the men's bodies, which become moving prisons, as the bricks remain still on their dancing forms. (*Façades*, 2009)

Escale is a company that aims to produce 'total theatre,' 'pushing further the boundaries of theatre, mime, dance, circus and object theatre' (Escale 'Gestuel').¹ Formed at the beginning of the 1990s by Hugues Hollenstein and Grit Krausse, respectively French and German, the company became itinerant when the couple's children were born. In order to deal with the constraints of intensive touring without being separated from their progeny, Hollenstein and Krausse decided that life on the road was the best option. After a dramatic car accident that destroyed all their material, the company was hosted by the new circus collective Les Oiseaux Fous. It is in this context that Escale discovered the use of marquees, and eventually purchased two. After a few years of collaboration, Escale started touring more on its own, and in 1998 it became fully itinerant, not settling down again until 2004. The work Escale produces might be labelled 'physical theatre' if it were performed in the UK. The French language, however, has no linguistic equivalent to the term 'physical theatre.' Instead, to translate the expression, it proposes a multiplicity of approximate terms such as 'théâtre gestuel,' 'théâtre corporel,' or 'théâtre visual.'² I argue that if there are no terms in French, however

¹ Author's translation: 'un théâtre total, 'nous jouons à repousser les frontières du théâtre, du mime, de la danse, du cirque et du théâtre d'objet.'

² 'Gestural theatre,' 'corporeal theatre,' or 'visual theatre.'

general, that provide an equivalent to 'physical theatre,' it is likely because such work is far from being dominant in the French theatrical tradition. On the other hand, this terminological lacuna complicates the ways in which physical practices can be presented in France.

The term 'physical theatre' is highly unsatisfying, and I agree with Simon Murray and John Keefe who propose that speaking about 'physical theatres' instead would allow an acknowledgement of these practices' inherent multiplicity.³ Critical discourse on 'physical theatres' is therefore problematised by the divergent plurality of practices categorised as such. More, many commentators rely on vocabularies borrowed from dance studies to analyse movement in performance. The equation is, in the case of *Escale*, more complicated, as the company develop their work in a context where theatre studies is still heavily informed by literary criticism and much less academic attention is focused on dance. In this context, *Escale's* shows inhabit a liminal space, drawing on a multiplicity of disciplines and terminologies. Its situation therefore inflects and influences my position as a researcher who wishes to study the company's work from the perspective of 'physical theatres.' Both Hollenstein and Krausse consider the work they create and perform to be inseparable from their choice for *itinérance*. The one is at the same time cause and consequence of the other: it is because they are a 'theatre of movement' that they also are 'theatre in movement'⁴ (Personal Interview). Putting a great emphasis on physicality in their shows, *Escale* locate their work on the margins of the theatrical landscape.

Contemporary theatre practice in France often places considerable importance on the text, and on language.⁵ Several critics have noted that this tendency consists of 'putting the character in brackets,'⁶ and with them all practices that relate to

³ There is indeed no exhaustive definition of 'physical theatre': as Murray and Keefe suggest, '[it] is [...] about intersections, cross-over and spillages' (1). Physical theatres are composite, made from a multiplicity of techniques.

⁴ Author's translation: 'théâtre en mouvement' and 'théâtre du mouvement.'

⁵ Consider for example the experimental playwriting of Valère Novarina, Hubert Colas or Nadège Prugnard, or the work of director Claude Régy, whose latest production *Ode Maritime* (2009) consists of an actor standing still on stage and delivering a text by Fernando Pessoa.

⁶ The fact that this expression uses a metaphor borrowed from writing ('brackets') strikes me as an illuminating example of this tendency.

psychological interpretation, in order to give the text the most important place' (Didong 7).⁷ The centrality of the text in many contemporary productions is echoed by the prevalence of a language borrowed from literary studies for artists to speak about their work, and for academics to analyse performance. In interviews conducted with French actors who worked with director Claude Régy, Paola Didong noted that the expressions used by these artists compared their work on stage with the labour of the writer (138). The centrality of a literary referent is also characteristic of theatre studies in France, as one can see in recent work that explores the voice in the text, or the legacy of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis in contemporary performance.⁸

Criticism that focuses on physical practices is rare, and often influenced by a strong literary tradition also. The situation of dance studies in France is particularly illuminating in this respect. Gore, Louppe and Piollet note that although dance in France is highly respected on stage, 'it has not been granted any theoretical importance, and it is still considered as minor in that aspect' (Gore, Louppe and Piollet 36). This is still the case, as one can see when researching the courses offered in dance studies by French universities: only four institutions propose a dance studies course at Masters level, against twenty-one in the UK; among them, just three offer PhD programs, as opposed to ten for the UK (Centre National de la Danse; Postgraduateresearch.com). The position of the Jacques Lecoq school, still considered by many student actors to occupy a limited niche in actor training, is another significant example of the way physical practices are perceived in France. David Bradby suggests that the marginalisation of the school is caused by its absence of any written protocol or treatise, a feature he sees as 'unusual in a theatre culture which [...] still values new developments in theatre practice partly by the extent to which they give rise to [...] theoretical discourses' (Bradby 89).⁹ This is even

⁷ Author's translation: '...mettre entre parenthèses le personnage et avec lui toutes les pratiques relevant d'une interprétation psychologique, afin de donner au texte la première place.'

⁸ Several studies in France do indeed focus on questions such as the disappearance of the character, the importance of the voice, and of dialogical structures, such as the actual plot of contemporary theatre. See for example Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and Julie Sermon, Denis Guénoun, and Arnaud Rykner.

⁹ And indeed, as Bradby notes further in his analysis, Antonin Artaud's 'total theatre,' although calling for a distanciation from texts, has been defined by Artaud in several different writings (Bradby 90).

more surprising when considering the fame and respect accorded to the school abroad, especially in the UK.

A similar paradox can be observed in the practice of mime. In fact, although several of the most influential mime masters are French – Marcel Marceau, or Étienne Decroux, with whom Hollenstein trained – the genre is under-represented, often considered outdated by a public which still often associates it with Marceau's iconic white-faced character Pip. Several artists also regret the lack of a terminology capable of accurately reflecting their practice, a concern voiced by members of Schlémil Théâtre in a survey initiated by the Centre National du Mime: 'it is difficult to put a name on the artistic form we defend, which is neither theatre or dance, and not only mime' (qtd. in CNM 24). In this survey, several companies expressed their regret at the absence of funding, networks and touring opportunities in France.¹⁰ Artists whose work focuses on physicality were – and still are – debating the legitimacy of their practice and aesthetic.

Escale's work is, in light of these problems, very hard to classify. Lacking a better term, the company's work is usually described as either 'théâtre gestuel' or 'théâtre corporel,' or sometimes 'théâtre visual.'¹¹ It shares a professional network with practices such as mime, new circus, puppetry and street theatre. Indeed, Escale's work shares some key features with each of these art forms: *Est ou Ouest* (2009) is, for example, constructed around Grit Krausse's aerial acts on the silk. *Aucun Poisson Ne Rit des Souvenirs* (1992), Escale's first show, bears the marks of Hollenstein's training in corporeal mime with Decroux; *Façades* borrowed movement vocabularies from contemporary dance. However, Escale practitioners are most often associated with these networks because of their itinerant lifestyle rather than their actual work. They belong to marginal street theatre cultures, and to the

¹⁰ The Centre National du Mime is a structure created and run by Etienne Bonduelle, whose efforts are directed toward institutional and public recognition of practices currently regarded as mime. The CNM has an acute lack of funding, and its breadth and impact have dramatically regressed over the past five years.

¹¹ It is worth noting that none of these expressions are clearly defined, and sometimes can appear to have contradictory meanings: for example, however vague and tautological 'visual theatre' may sound, the term is often associated with what might in the UK be described as physical theatre practices or contemporary mime, but on the other hand it is sometimes used to differentiate physical theatre practice from 'mime corporel' (author's translation: 'corporeal mime') (Martinez 18).

travelling theatre network, but they do not consider either their productions or their lifestyle to be characteristic of any specific community (Hollenstein and Krausse, E-mail).

The interdisciplinarity inherent to Escale's work and the generic in-between space that it inhabits in France are mirrored in the physical, geographical position induced by the company's life choices. In fact, there is a close relation between Escale's physicality and mobility. Being able to travel means that its members can perform in geographically remote areas, in villages deserted by cultural life. It also means that the company is out of the usual commercial circuit, something voiced by Escale as a political decision. In a conversation on nomadism published in the street performance journal *Stradda*, Hollenstein insists on the necessity for itinerant companies to 'organise travels that are more personal, and not influenced by opportunities of being programmed in festivals' (qtd. in Voisin 26).¹² Escale map out their touring trajectories by establishing strong contacts with local communities, a feature that allows them to perform in marginal areas but that also excludes them from much of the theatrical landscape of the country. Escale is well-known and respected among mime and itinerant theatre networks;¹³ it also receives 'aide à l'itinérance' from the state, as part of a scheme designed to help circus companies fund the costs of itinérance. But because its members very rarely appear in mainstream theatre festivals, and never perform in traditional theatre buildings or in big towns, Escale remains invisible to most theatre-goers. Although there is a deliberate and conscious choice on Escale's part to avoid mainstream networks, the company also regrets the lack of public visibility it is afforded twenty years after its creation. Hollenstein recognises his own responsibility in dealing badly with promoters, acknowledging his feelings of suspicion toward them (Informal

¹² Author's translation: 'Il faut [re]prendre des voyages plus personnels qui ne s'appuient pas sur des trajets de programmation établis.'

¹³ Escale was, for example, invited in 2008 to a national round-table on mime practices in France, at Le Vieux-Colombier, along with high-profile personalities such as Lucile Bodson, director of the International Institute for Puppetry of Charleville-Mézières, and Jean-Claude Cotillard, director of École Supérieure d'Art Dramatique de Paris. It also often appears in articles about itinérance, and occupies a significant place in the itinerant community, an achievement emphasised by Hollenstein's position as a director of the CITI (International Centre of Itinerant Theatre) between 2000 and 2007.

Interview).¹⁴ I argue that Escale's difficulty in performing outside the networks to which it is usually relegated – circus, mime, street theatre – also has to do with the nature of the work it produces, namely performances that do not fit within the boundaries of pre-established categories because they fuse together many techniques that are not often discussed in critical terms.

Being itinerant, Escale engenders a unique overlap of living, rehearsal and performance space. Its camp and marquee blur the boundaries between different kinds of theatre space, naturally raising questions about the notions of openness and enclosure. When Escale sets up its camp, it builds an inside from an outside: the tent, for example, has to be mounted from poles and plastic to create the final marquee. The marquee, built on the ground of whichever town the group settles in and surrounded by Escale's caravans, is a way to 'invite people into our home, into their home'¹⁵ (Hollenstein and Krausse, Personal Interview). The camp and the marquee simultaneously constitute what Gay McAuley defines as performance spaces, rehearsal spaces, public spaces and private spaces (94). During the time when Escale was a full-time itinerant company, the box-office and the lavatories were situated in old-fashioned caravans, open to the public on performance nights. These private spaces – the company's bathroom, in a bright green caravan, and offices, in a deep aubergine one – were then transformed into public spaces. On these occasions, Escale's settlement was the place where the show was happening, but also where the company's atypical lifestyle was put on display. The whole settlement would become 'presentational space' constituted of 'both the architectural features of the stage as it exists in any given theatre [...] and the organization of this space for the production in question' (McAuley 79). The marquee constitutes the stage on which the show is performed, but it also occupies a central position in the whole settlement: the caravans are organised around it, it attracts attention by its size and colour, and it epitomizes both itinérance and the prospect of entertainment. Therefore, the marquee and the spaces that exist 'outside' it but within the boundaries of the camp – the caravans, the truck that can be turned into a kitchen – become spaces for the performance of itinérance.

¹⁴ This attitude seems to be influenced by a general feeling of defiance and suspicion from Escale toward the establishment. One wonders whether this suspicion is only one-sided.

¹⁵ Author's translation: 'on invite les gens chez nous, chez eux.'

Escale's members live an alternative life, producing their work on the geographical and cultural margins of the country, and they are above all else concerned with leading an existence that is politically coherent. Their everyday life is built on an alternative understanding of the collective, and physical tasks are shared independently of gender considerations. Indeed, over the years, their artistic work has become increasingly radical. Their latest show for example, *Est ou Ouest*, might be considered as agit-prop, pamphleteering for a reconsideration of socialism. The action of bringing experimental performances to culturally excluded rural areas, and of organising workshops in high schools located in the countryside of the *Région Centre*, is completely dependent on this extreme-left political ideal. Using Baz Kershaw's analysis of the radical in theatre, I argue that what makes Escale an activist company also lies in its rooting in physical theatre. Due to its context of production, in which there is an important connection between literacy and performance, the company's work situates it on the fringes of alternative art because it does not necessarily need to rely on a literary referent: its physical theatre becomes one of the 'alternative underground "genres" [...] that established [it] [...] beyond the cultural mainstream' (Kershaw 59). Moreover, Kershaw, drawing on Lefebvre's concept of the theatre building being 'shaped by the ruling ideologies' argues that performances happening inside theatre buildings are 'deeply embedded in theatre as a *disciplinary system*' (Lefebvre qtd. in Kershaw 31). By performing in different spaces – that is, in spaces used for the performance of *itinérance* – Escale literally performs its politics, displaying alternative ways of living and doing performance. To borrow once again from Kershaw, Escale's performance is radical because:

the freedom [it] invokes is not just freedom *from* oppression, repression, exploitation – the resistant sense of the radical – but also freedom *to reach beyond* existing systems of formalised power, freedom to create currently unimaginable forms of association and action... (18)

This freedom of action, association, and creation is what commentators are keen to read from the outside: the 'true spirit of

a troupe, of a family' (Ballista), a theatre 'far from the comfortable temples of art' (Y.C.).¹⁶

Dialogue as a Methodological Tool, and the Researcher's Positioning in Escale's Settlement

It is 7pm, late October. Inside the marquee everything is dark, apart from the stage: a circle of wood, which is brightly lit. A broad tube blows hot air inside the tent, in an attempt to warm the space up. A long piece of red fabric hangs centre stage, sustained by three poles. A few colourful chairs have been installed, close to the opening in the tent from where the machine blows. I am sitting in the borders of the light. It is cold. The group of non-professional actors arrive; I am introduced to them; the rehearsal can start. It smells of wet countryside and gasoline. I arrived two hours ago.

Escale's position in-between disciplines, and across geographical spaces, means that one cannot approach them as one might approach a more formal company. Because they have such a unique lifestyle, and because this lifestyle shapes their work, meeting Escale became for me an experience close to conducting fieldwork in an ethnographical context. I wish here to use a frame of analysis informed by ethnography, and will take as an example the approach used by Sarah Gorman when attending rehearsals of the New York City Players. I am aware that many critics have written on the use of a methodology informed by ethnography when analysing dance and movement, and that several have called for the phenomenological involvement of the viewer to be taken into account (Martin 112; Novack 115). However, another dimension of fieldwork is at play here considering the immersive nature of my stay with the company. I did not only attend rehearsals and work on their archives but also shared Escale's way of living for a few days.

My relationship with Escale has been shaped by an interplay of constant status shifts. One dimension of this status play consisted of a dialogical relationship between Escale and I, and between each one of the company's members and I. Hollenstein,

¹⁶ Author's translation: 'un esprit de troupe, de famille' (Ballista, 2000); 'loin des temples de l'art confortable' (Y.C). The conceptualisation of Escale as an alternative miniature society often appears in press articles, and the artists are aware of the ideal they bring along with them when settling down in a town. Ballista speaks of Escale's 'mini village,' another journalist describes them as 'minstrels' (*saltimbanques*) (Y.C.).

for example, proved to be more than happy to share the company's archives, and allowed me a great deal of freedom when looking through their video recordings and press archives. The question of dialogue was absolutely central, and, as such, I felt that a dialogical research structure would be the most effective way forward in my approach to the company's large archives, particularly as Hollenstein often sat next to me, commenting on the footage.¹⁷ This seemed to be a way for him to retrospectively make sense of Escalé's work, and he expressed a concern that this may not have been achieved if I had not been there to watch this material. It was also a privileged way for me to see Escalé's work contextualised, explained and deciphered by one of its principal figures.

My presence in Escalé's everyday life essentially worked in a way not dissimilar to what Quetzil E. Castañeda has called the 'trigger' of ethnographical fieldwork. Castañeda identifies the 'trigger' as a phenomenon opposed to the ethnographic method of 'elicitation': 'conceived as a minimalist presence and nearly non-interference in the life ... of the subjects of research' (Castañeda 90). This conception supposes that 'data pre-exists independently of research problems and methodologies developed to find it' (90). In fact, Hollenstein's confession that my presence had shed light on work he had not seen in years, and my awareness of how much my knowledge of Escalé's work was dependent on my presence at Le Grand Bourreau, made clear that the

responses and reactions that research subjects have to researchers are always and can only be a response to the individual and particular fieldworker. It is a response in-situ in relation to the researcher's questions, attitudes and presentations of self in the actual socio-historical situation of the interaction. (90)

This feature has led to the need I now feel to include myself in the writings that resulted from the fieldwork, to allow myself to find a

¹⁷ Several of the conversations I had on theoretical, aesthetic or philosophical matters were with Hollenstein himself, who was usually sitting next to me when I watched recordings of their work. The reason for Hollenstein's continuous presence, as opposed to Krausse's apparently more restrained participation in the debate, was partly due to his position as director of most of the company's shows, but also partially because he was also, at the time we met, writing up a Masters thesis on applied theatre, and thus seemed keen to share theoretical debates with me.

voice. I follow here the example of Sarah Gorman who relied on ethnography in order to accurately express the ambivalence she felt had been at the core of her 'fieldwork' (Gorman). Gorman wanted to acknowledge how much she felt her presence affected the whole rehearsal process, and how her position was more one of a 'participant-observer' than a passive observer gathering data. This positioning allows the argument to become dialogical by acknowledging the researcher's biases while situating the subject of observation on an equal level, making clear his/her influence on the researcher's understanding of their practices.

One major shift in this status dialogue happened on the morning of the third day of my stay, when I joined forces with everybody present in the camp to help unload one of the company's lorries. I felt that along with thankfulness for my early morning efforts came a sort of trust, as if I had gained my full status by showing that I was not taking distance from the more laborious aspects of Escale's life. On the other hand, physical labour became a way for me to truly grasp some of the features of Escale's everyday life. Through my physical participation, the fieldwork became 'field-work'.¹⁸ I was gathering information on the company's everyday life and achieving a bodily understanding of their situation. I could compare this work to the numerous 'get-ins' and 'get-outs' I have myself taken part in with the company I work with, listing and comparing different grades of fatigue or muscular pain. A 'bodily intertextuality' in Lena Hammergren's words, was at this point possible. Taking as an example the position of the historian, sensitive to the bodily inscription of other bodies in documents recording a specific event, Hammergren argues that these processes of recollection 'call up memory associations' that 'activate a bodily memory, in order to come closer to the reality of these disappeared bodies' (53-55). Unloading a truck is just one moment of the company's installation procedures. I realised that this highly demanding physical labour came before *any* performance, and was therefore able to grasp (at least to an extent) the level of sacrifice that Escale's independence engendered. Through my position as a working body I was given the chance to understand, with reference to my own physical history, a part of how Escale's everyday life not only looked, but also how it felt.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Lise Uytterhoeven for suggesting the hyphenation to place emphasis on the importance of labour and physical participation in my research.

To the material I have gathered on Escale, I have added another kind of archive, born of my spoken and enacted dialogue with its members. In this regard, I situate myself at the point of encounter between an ethnographical approach and a phenomenological approach, a positioning that Cynthia Novack, in *Sharing the Dance*, has called for as a way of helping researchers to fully grasp the sociological, physiological and emotional impacts of movement in performance. Movement being at the core of Escale's artistic and everyday lives, such an approach seems completely relevant. Escale's very idiosyncratic way of living and of producing work did not just shape our relationship, but also shaped the discourse I was engaging in with the company, turning the object-subject relationship into an open dialogue.

The fact that Escale function in a distinctly French context also played an acute part in shaping both my relationship with them and my positioning as a researcher. It is not only a question of negotiating performance across disciplines (and for me, across critical methodologies): Escale are, in France, unnameable; as we have seen earlier in this paper, there is no clear, distinct vocabulary to think about their work.¹⁹ On the company's website, Escale describes its work through metaphors such as 'actors inebriated with movement.'²⁰ The press, in order to describe the company's work, is forced to refer to a multiplicity of different art forms: 'techniques that oscillate between mime, acting, contemporary dance, clown, circus, mask or object theatre' (Y.C.).²¹ The challenge is then, for the company, to find adequate terminologies to describe its objectives, its work and its shows. I also argue that the absence

¹⁹ Of course, one can describe in minute detail one of Escale's shows, borrowing vocabularies and using metaphors. However, there are no general terms to evoke or classify their actual style. The technical languages developed by Etienne Decroux of Jacques Lecoq for example, could be useful to describe Escale's work. However, each of these terminologies has aesthetical connotations. Strong divisions have marked the history of mime throughout the 20th century, in France, each school claims its superiority over the others. Choosing one vocabulary over another could lead to a potential confusion of meanings. More, if such vocabularies are useful tools to describe mime and corporeal theatre, they do not seem completely appropriate to describe dance or circus techniques. French critical language on these matters still has to take distance from literary concepts: see for example the work of Rykner and Martinez.

²⁰ 'actors inebriated with movement.'

²¹ Author's translation: 'techniques qui oscillent entre le mime, l'acteur, la danse contemporaine, le clown, le cirque, le masque ou le theatre d'objet.'

of precise words to describe 'physical theatre' in French not only affects the way the genre is perceived by French audiences, but also the way the work is thought of and created. I think, in line with Toni D'Amelio, that languages shape different conceptions of the body, and that 'ways of thinking become attitudes that predispose the dancing body to move in certain ways; ways of thinking also have an immediate currency and influence as they construct discourse on dance' (90). The fact the French language lacks words when confronted with physicality induces a specific relationship with the moving body. D'Amelio compares the two French and English *faux-amis* words *premise* and *prémisse*. English is her mother tongue but, having spent a large part of her life in Paris, she considers herself to be in a good position to give an insight into the ways in which both language and culture operate. I wish to adopt a similar – albeit inverted – positioning, being a French native but living in the UK and researching in English.

D'Amelio comments on Tim Etchells' interpretation of the work of two French choreographers: Jérôme Bel and Loïc Touzé. She argues that Etchells' misunderstanding is rooted in fundamental differences in the perception and interpretation of dance between the two cultures. Building on the idea that the French *prémisse* has a predominantly philosophical register, while the English 'premise' is more pragmatic, she then draws a comparison between this semantic difference between the two languages, and a similar trend that she sees in the two dance cultures. Her analysis of French dance is thus drawn from a substantial amount of theoretical work: 'as the word "premise" oscillates back and forth between its physical and conceptual facets, it encapsulates my larger argument that thought and action mutually engender one another' (90). The French taste for abstract concepts, along with a text-centric tradition in scholarly culture, not only shaped perceptions of dance, but also the way in which physical theatres are created and executed. It is also significant that in a debate about physical theatres I am forced to rely on dance criticism when discussing such productions in English, in much the same way as D'Amelio illustrates. The task is further complicated in French due to the fact that French criticism is informed to such a great extent by literary studies. This vocabulary can prove useful when analysing how physical performances take distance from linear narrative structures, becoming a 'hors-texte' (something outside of the text), as discussed by Arnaud Rykner or Ariane Martinez. I argue, however, that lacking a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the nature of their work to the general public, these

artists are effectively forced to see their work relegated to a broad and homogenous underground category. This marginalisation has surely contributed in no small part to the radicalisation of many of these companies' political attitudes, as in the case of Escale.

Escale's work is impossible to classify in the country in which it is produced, due in large part to a lack of words to describe it. This positions Escale at a point of encounter between a number of different disciplines and terminologies, and therefore requires from the researcher a constant positioning in-between methodologies, definitions, languages and labellings. In this case, the adoption of a dialogic structure for criticism was most appropriate, placing both researcher and artist on the same level, allowing each of them a voice. Mixing an ethnographic and a literary approach, such a structure will also prove valuable in future analyses of movement in performance that draw on both the French and UK academic traditions. This will allow both the researcher's and artists' biases and subjectivities to be acknowledged, and, in the case of Escale, it will contribute to the production of a discourse on an invisible discipline, words on a work that cannot be spoken about.

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