







but also more direct oppositions like love and hate, aggression and tenderness, beauty and ugliness are united in one body. They all come as part of the same kit. Someone who is in love is teetering on the edge of hate and a beautiful person always sees the reflection of their own ugliness, as well. So I regard people as dualistic beings who, in order to keep going, must always be in a mental state of dynamic balance. I want to express that physically, and the Countertechnique is an ideal method for achieving that. Over the years, I have increasingly come to see physical counterdirections as the reflection of a psychological structure.'

In her work, then, there are increasing signs of an often bizarre emotional dramaturgy, with certainty as the extreme of uncertainty, jest as seriousness, and compassion as deferred cruelty. With a little dig at the postmodern, fragmented person, Van Dijk shows the drama of the tyrant who weeps for his victim, and of the happiness that turns out to be misery. While the polarised moods still alternate in a piece like *Hart, kwink, moker*, they seem almost to amalgamate in her more recent pieces. In *Alien*, a male dancer embraces a female dancer in a stranglehold. In *Amour fou*, the body which craves fulfilment is wrapped in transparent plastic. In *Suna no onna* (2003), a dancer labours over a never-ending task; he shows his strength by walking up a sloping plank covered in sand, but also his weakness by slipping down again with each step.

But isn't all this emotionality, hybrid or not, at odds with the dry, analytical, mathematical approach of the Countertechnique? Aren't these two approaches at variance with one another? Van Dijk: 'Totally – but they have to be. Because in order to express emotions on stage, the dancers have to be as unemotional as possible. The emotionality of my pieces lies in the structure of the movements. I am not an actor, but I think that dance is completely different to theatre in this respect. I only fully realised this during the working process of *Nothing hurts*, a piece I made in collaboration with the German director Falk Richter. When the dancers reached the same level of emotion as the actors, they just couldn't move any more. It had a constraining effect. During that same working process, I also became aware, for the first time, of the principles of what I now call the Countertechnique. A rapid emotional changeover, from aggression to tenderness, for instance, has nothing to do with actually feeling those emotions. It has to do with space, with directed energy and with sending out the movements in counterdirections in order to retain a state of dynamic balance. This gives the dancers on stage a sort of transparency; they open up, as it were. And this is exactly what makes them human in the eyes of the audience; emotional, capricious beings. But the dancers themselves feel none of that. At most, they are thinking: thigh goes down, pelvis up, heel backwards, knee forwards. Emotions are spatial directions.

#### DANCERS' BREATH

A very recent experience reinforced Van Dijk in her convictions when she presented her new performance *STAU* in Studio Dok, on the Entrepotdok in Amsterdam. It is based on the abstract opposition between large and small spaces. In the Studio, a tiny dancing area was created, fenced off by chairs. Two dancers kept almost brushing the rather timid faces of the audience – the dancers' sweat, the dancers' warmth, the dancers' breath – it could all be felt, seen and smelt by the audience, sometimes only a couple of millimetres away. Later on, the dancing area was made larger; the chairs were stacked up in a corner and the audience promptly lost their seats and stood, sat or lay down in the space in between the dancers. As a real participating audience. Van Dijk asked the audience to fill in their responses to this on a questionnaire after the performance. 'Their responses all turned out to be extremely emotional,' she said. 'One person might feel embarrassed, another giggly, while yet another was moved. And all of that while the dancers were only occupied with counterdirections. What's more, if they hadn't been using these, especially in the small space, then they would have flown all over the place or hit someone in the face. So I see the Countertechnique as a physical and mental necessity, with theatrical consequences. Without this technique, I would never have been able to make *STAU*.

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