

© Alexander Meeus

ALIX EYNAUDI EDELWEISS

Edelweiss, a danced rebus

Edelweiss is a piece for those who find pleasure in reading.

Edelweiss plays with intelligibility: a danced rebus where signs and references abound for their own sake.

Edelweiss treats all of its components as loved art works. It is time spent on gestures, sirens and robots, fabrics and drawings.

Edelweiss cultivates affection for the skillful dedication of craftsmen.

Edelweiss embraces techniques as forms of poetry, and artistry as a form of care.

Edelweiss is a meditation on the taste for signs and the taste of each sign, when signification is on leave.

NOTES AROUND 'EDELWEISS

Quim Pujol

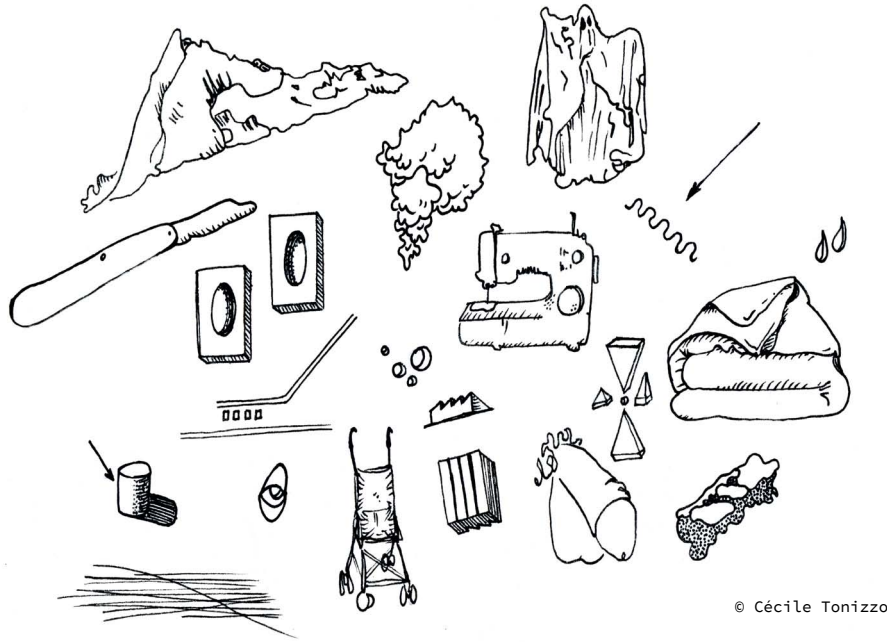
Believing in modernity has become increasingly difficult because the fulfillment of the promise of progress associated with the development of technology is constantly failing. This occurs because techniques do not serve a Humanist program, but they proliferate uncontrollably, their only goal being economic profitability.

Working around the idea of craftsmanship in *Edelweiss*, Eynaudi gives special relevance to dance as a technique for proposing a certain way of inhabiting the world. With this gesture the artist moves away from both virtuous exhibitionism (technique as a value in itself) and the refusal of technique as a source of symbolic inequality between artists and audiences. Putting the craftsman's technique at the service of a political proposal implies reconnecting technique with ethics. Even though the craftsman is not a modern emblem, paradoxically, it is only by collectively engaging in this endeavor that we might rehabilitate the concept of progress and in so doing, experience true modernity. That is, our society would then be less affected by smartphones and tablets and more by new ways of understanding each other and thinking together.

In *Edelweiss* Alix Eynaudi also explores "rebus" -an allusional device that uses pictures to represent words or parts of words- as a generative tool for the choreography. However, the meaning of these "danced rebus" is never revealed. By invoking signification and making interpretation impossible at the same time, to a certain extent Eynaudi deactivates rational analysis and confronts us with an experience which emphasizes the sensorial.

This gesture resonates with Susan Sontag's classic essay *Against Interpretation*, where the writer complains about a culture "whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and sensual capability". Besides this pre-existing cultural bias, excess and overproduction would dull our senses even further and therefore Sontag affirms that "what is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more."

Although this demand could be understood as the thousandth complaint about the subaltern role of the body in Western culture, it becomes especially relevant because of its political implications. A society of sensorially-dulled individuals turns into a heap of bodies partially isolated from other bodies, objects and the environment. As Richard Sennett declares in his essay about the craftsman, "people seek refuge in inwardness when material engagement proves empty". On the contrary, the overwhelming sensuality of "Edelweiss" suggests a poetics of connectivity towards the ocean of materials in which human bodies are inserted. It also implies a certain *joie de vivre*, a celebration of the things which surround us.



© Cécile Tonizzo

However, Eynaudi's multifaceted choreographic practice goes far beyond a poetics of connectivity and encompasses a wide range of strategies and formal devices, each carrying its own political implications: balance, touch, care...

Balance occasionally becomes a prominent aspect in the choreography itself, but above all constitutes the result of a certain attitude towards things, where everything is given the same amount of attention. This means that all theatrical resources acquire the same relevance. But more specifically, it might also mean that objects become as important as humans and in this material conversation some objects might "talk back".

Furthermore, the relevance of touch in *Edelweiss* can be associated with the symbolic dimension of this sense. If gaze allows us to compose a hermetic image of the bodies and objects we encounter, tactility tends to blur the boundaries between us and the world. Touch also engages us in a physical negotiation where perceiving the world implies simultaneously trying to understand what the world is made of, how it impinges on us and, even, what are the properties and history of the materials with which we come in contact.

Along with these elements, "care" is one of the most important aspects of *Edelweiss*. Care manifests itself both in the symbols of the piece as well as the movement quality and the way the performers relate to objects. That is, every gesture of the choreography is executed carefully: bodies dance as much as they take care of each other, and great care is also taken in the manipulation of the objects onstage.

In our society, care is linked to female identity and sexism would explain why it is economically and symbolically undervalued. Vindicating care as Mierle Laderman Ukeles did in her *Maintenance Art Manifesto* (1969)¹ remains an urgent task today.

1 http://feldmangallery.com/media/pdfs/Ukeles_MANIFESTO.pdf

Moreover, David Graeber shows how contempt towards this dimension of care has consequences in the way we understand labor:

“It’s just our obsession with certain very specific forms of rather macho male labor–factory workers, truck-drivers, that sort of thing–which then becomes the paradigm of all labor in our imaginations; that blinds us to the fact that the bulk of working class people have always been engaged in caring labor of one sort or another. So I think we need to start by redefining labor itself, maybe, start with classic “women’s work,” nurturing children, looking after things, as the paradigm for labor itself and then it will be much harder to be confused about what’s really valuable and what isn’t.”

This approach already underlies the political practice of one of the most interesting figures of the European New Left, Manuela Carmena, the new mayor of Madrid, who in her inaugural address declared that she was “going to work with politics of care (...) also known as women’s culture”.

Of course the most common objection to this kind of proposal is that it does not seem to consider confrontation as a tool for social transformation. This objection can be easily overcome by clarifying that it is not about avoiding conflict at all costs, rather about only considering it as a last option.

Another source of resistance towards this approach comes from its lack of epics. That is, ardent discourses filled with heroic resonances tend to be much more effective and seductive both in politics and art.

As the “hero” is the privileged archetype of traditional masculinity, our “spontaneous” inclination towards epics might reveal to what extent we still have work to do in order to get rid of sexist thinking patterns still inscribed in our bodies. Or, to say it with other words, the same binary understanding of the world which sets male and female or body and mind as opposites self-perpetuates itself by privileging conflict – literal binary antagonism – as a way of relating to the world. Becoming aware of this tautology might be a first step towards breaking away from it.



© Alexander Meeus

BIOGRAPHY

ALIX EYNAUDI

Lives and works in Vienna.

Alix Eynaudi was trained as a ballet dancer in the Opéra of Paris. She worked in various ballet companies before entering PARTS when the school first opened. In 1996, Alix joined Anne-Teresa De Keersmaeker's company Rosas where she worked for 7 years.

Alix has been creating her own works since 2005: *Crystalll* (2005), in collaboration with Alice Chauchat, *Supernaturel* (2007), *The Visitants* and *Long Long Short Long Short* (2009), both projects in collaboration with Agata Maszkiewicz, *Exit* (2011) in collaboration with Kris Verdonck and more recently *Monique* (2012).

In parallel, Alix takes part in projects as a dancer and performer with a.e. the collective Superamas, Kris Verdonck, Anne Juren and Boris Charmatz. As well, she regularly teaches workshops internationally.

www.alixeynaudi.com

CREDITS

Concept & choreography: Alix Eynaudi

Performers: Alix Eynaudi, Mark Lorimer, Cécile Tonizzo, Alice Chauchat

Costumes: An Breugelmans

Drawings & embroidery: Cécile Tonizzo

Light design: Bruno Pocheron

Production in Belgium: Hiros

Production in Austria: Sarah Blumenfeld for "boîte de production - Verein für Zeitgenössischen Tanz und zeitgenössische Installationen"

Co-production: Kunstencentrum BUDA (BE), Tanzquartier Wien (AT)

With the support of: MA7 - Kulturabteilung der Stadt Wien, XING Bologna, l'Institut Français d'Autriche, Vlaamse Gemeenschapscommissie

Thanks to: Our intern Naima Marilyn Mazic, Christian & Geneviève Eynaudi, Quim Pujol, Olivier Renouf, Tom Pauwels and Nancy Banfi

Music: *Petite symphonie intuitive pour un paysage de printemps*, Luc Ferrari, Acousmatrix- The History of Electronic Music III

Poème Électronique, Edgar Varèse, An Anthology Of Noise and Electronic Music, Vol.1

Presque rien avec Filles, Luc Ferrari, Acousmatrix- The History of Electronic Music III

ODE TO THE IMAGINATION

Lieve Dierckx

E-tcetera

27.11.2015

<http://www.e-tcetera.be/edelweiss-alix-eynaudi>

Edelweiss is one of those shows that have you by the short hairs without your having to know what is at stake precisely. Just think of the work of Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion or of Sara Manente. In their case it is the iron consistency with which they follow apparently absurd, self-imposed parameters – in terms of rhythm, score or movement material – that always draw me in as a spectator. As far as I'm concerned, it's preferable to experience that type of fascination in as pure a form as possible, without any introductory or dramaturgic brochure, and yes, also without a review that preconditions your gaze. Because each performance is entitled to context, I wanted to start with a warning: only read this review after the performance.



© Alexander Meeus

Edelweiss itself, however, surfs effortlessly over and through perspectives. This is already clear when you enter the theatre: to the front right there hangs a pen drawing on paper, vulnerable in the high space. The theme of the drawing evokes something pastoral, and later my memory reconstructs a souvenir out of it that relates to the home crafts of three women. There is no certainty, for that the drawing was too far away. Once the house lights have been dimmed, there emerges from behind a blue velvet curtain, which hangs three-quarters deep in the black box of Kaaistudio's, not a woman, but performer Mark Lorimer, bare-chested and with a cotton scarf around his neck. The portrayal of the three women has, however, already sunk its teeth into my imagination, for now too my connotations are pastoral: I imagine him at work in the mountainous landscape to which the title refers, the Austria from which choreographer Alix Eynaudi comes.

Lorimer is the first of four performers who will appear in an uninterrupted sequence from the concealed space behind the blue curtain. Besides Lorimer, these are Alix Eynaudi, Cécile Tonizzo and Alice Chauchat. They come and go: alone, in duo, trio or quartet, always wearing different costumes. They do things, stage all sorts of actions throughout the entire performance. While their expressive register covers a limited range from robotic to emotionless and neutral, their movements are focused on each moment, outlined with extreme care and the utmost clarity. We are served up a performance with purposeful people and apparently functional movements. And yet this foursome prefers to explore precarious positions – with the instep of the foot for support, for instance, or balancing vertically on the bottom of a prostrate dancer and who, under the feet of the former, contracts and releases his or her backside staccato. Nothing in their environment is fixed either. When two performers each seduce a speaker into a wild little dance, the soundscape swirls across the stage. And we later see the light race across the stage floor, or attached to a body like a visual extension. The instability spreads to the auditorium, and by extension to my head.

Sometimes there is a hint of recognizability: a woman on a chair holds a sheet up high in front of her, a second one comes and stands before it, and traces the shadowed outline of the concealed body with her finger. But we never quite discover what their objectives are, or what world they are situated in. Why do Lorimer's movements in his alleged mountain landscape bring to mind those of a robot? What does the gymnastic duo of Eynaudi and Tonizzo have to do with the painted wood bloc they put down, on which a small boy is portrayed – or with the kiss on the mouth that they exchange upside-down beside the object? It catches the attention, like a rebus. That was in fact the subtitle of the performance at the premiere in Tanzquartier Wien one month earlier, a danced rebus, but in Brussels not even that key is given up. With each new situation sketch, we are referred back to a vulnerable, receptive position of not-knowing.



© Alexander Meeus

While at the same time we know everything. Because each of these inexplicably utilitarian movement sequences contains a flash of imagination, a core of beauty: the impetus lies already in the pattern on Lorimer's scarf that will form a theme throughout the performance. It crops up regularly in the form of a lighting pattern, on the floor or on a wall. At least, that is how I think I saw it. Imagination emerges out of the traditional, baroque embroideries on the otherwise minimalist costumes of the dancers, out of the fantastic, revealing hole in the tent dress in which Chauchat covers herself. At times the absurd humour strikes a chord, for instance in the scene in which Eynaudi attaches herself to Lorimer's body like a phallus in action, while he observes, deadpan, how his manly pride appears feminine (Lorimer would besides have made a great comic). And throughout there is the virtuoso, inventive craftsmanship of the dancers that sharpens the attention for what comes next. They surf on the border between inside and outside, contraction and expansion, giving and taking, life and representation, and all that in a heightened state of awareness, because: we are looking at the art of dance.

Craft feeds art, art feeds craft, and together they feed us. This is also how you could interpret the scene in which Eynaudi executes a long drawn-out ritual around a little bronze statue of a heron feeding its young - her body can be seen as a high-tech instrument that executes subtle movements in a centuries-old temple dance. In many respects she here hosts the basics of life in her art: loving care and attention, the art of living tout court. At the same time, as the performance progresses, the performers' individual purposefulness increasingly makes way for contact and fantasy - or is it my spectator's gaze that is relaxing? In any case we can now catch a glimpse of the hotbed behind the curtain - one at a time its four pieces are briefly tied in a knot in the air. At the end of the show, the place can open up for good, in the form of a shrine with relics and attributes. What they represent exactly, and in whose honour, is something we can once more leave to our own associations.

What I myself saw in Edelweiss is a fascinating attempt at permeability between art and craft, between the spectator and life, which you can read in two directions, like a palindrome. Behind each reality lies another reality with as a common denominator the power of the imagination. Receptivity is what is at stake in this show. Alix Eynaudi has already done nice work on this subject in the past: in Exit, a collaboration with Kris Verdonck, she seduced the public for instance with cushions, blankets and a hypnotic trajectory of movement sequences until she had us where she wanted us, in a receptive state of half sleep. In Edelweiss she again succeeds wonderfully in establishing an open viewing attitude in the spectator, in this case by highlighting connecting elements - dedication, imagination - between art and, yes, life. When the news from Paris hits me as I exit the theatre, I wish everyone the wisdom of her sort of approach.

TOUR

08.10.2015 Kunstencentrum BUDA, Kortrijk (BE) - **première** -
23 + 24.10.2015 Tanzquartier Wien, Vienna (AT)
12 > 14.11.2015 Kaaitheater, Brussels (BE)

19.04.2016 XING, Bologna (IT) - **Italian première** -

CONTACT

Co-ordinator: Helga Baert, helga@hiros.be
Business support: Sam Loncke, sam@hiros.be
Production: Karen Verlinden, karen@hiros.be
Communication: Brecht Wille, brecht@hiros.be

HIROS

Hiros is the joint venture of the management offices Margarita Production and Mokum. Together we continue to build a solid framework for individual artists and artistic projects.

Hiros

Slachthuislaan 29 Boulevard de l'Abattoir - 1000 Brussels (BE)
+32 2 410 63 33 - contact@hiros.be - www.hiros.be
Hiros tva. BE0862 325 347 - Mokum tva. BE0895 726 209

WWW • **HIROS** • BE

Hiros is supported by the Flemish Community