



## **International Associate Artist Programme**

### **Cynthia Phung-Ngoc & Ennio Sammarco**

The International Associate Artist Programme (IAAP) provides opportunities for experienced international dance artists to critically reflect on their artistic practice and take time, in residence at DanceHouse, to further develop their own unique artistic process. It also offers opportunities to strengthen international contacts, to promote creative exchanges and share knowledge. The programme enables selected dance artists to work for concentrated periods of time on a self-designed programme of research and development. The artists engage and share with Dance Ireland, its members and our dance community through workshops, discussions and showings.

French dance artists Ennio Sammarco and Cynthia Phung-Ngoc were selected to work on an individualised creative residency, for 12 weeks over a 12-month period, from 2008 to 2009. The other artist, who worked during the same period, was Scottish/Berlin-based choreographer Colette Sadler. In 2010 Dance Ireland is working with Ted Stoffer/Sayaka Kaiwa (B), Anneke Hansen (USA) and Annabelle Bonnery (Fr).

Another aim is to create opportunities for international dance artists to establish connections with the wider Irish arts community and mutually benefit from each other's background and experience. Ennio and Cynthia worked with photographer/visual artist Elena Gallotta, whom they met through Filmbase ([www.filmbase.ie](http://www.filmbase.ie)) to film their last days of research, together and separately, inside and outside of the studio, which resulted in a short video *a time that is not made to...*

They also invited, the actor and writer **Duncan Keegan** to witness their last period of work; this essay ***Entanglement***, came out of this process.

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Initial proposal, June 2008 from Cynthia Phung-Ngoc and Ennio Sammarco, stated:

*After having known each other professionally for many years, we finally came together this year to work on a new creation entitled La Storia, produced by the company Association Woo.*

*The strength of our working relationship had led us to wonder about the potential of 'suspended time': time when, far from any performance pressure, we would focus deeply on the research and exchange of dreams and fears. The research process for this creation had raised issues such as new territories and the displacement of boundaries. Issues such as animality, metamorphosis, identity, memory - which are at the centre of our individual artistic research - came up too.*

*So Dance Ireland's proposal arrived right at this moment: the proposal for a residency dedicated purely to research and artistic exchange without the pressure of producing work seemed to come at just the right time for us. It seemed to correspond with what we have always tried to do and work on beside our normal production commitments.*

*We have thought of Ireland as a 'temporary action zone': a zone with cultural traditions so deeply rooted in nature, a history so linked to the notion of change and transit, a present open to change - all this seemed in perfect agreement with our approach. Dance Ireland's programme would allow us the time and space necessary to exchange, discuss, reflect and raise questions, all fundamental to a truly poetic and artistic engagement with the current world. Within the precious time offered and in keeping with the multi-disciplinarity which remains at the centre of our artistic approach, we would like to meet with other artists of the art scene in Ireland in order to create space for new interdisciplinary exchanges.*

## **ENTANGLEMENT**

*We drove that car as far as we could  
Abandoned it out West  
Split up on a dark sad night  
Both agreeing it was best.*

***Tangled up in blue, Bob Dylan 1974***

### PROLOGUE

How did it start? It started with an invitation.

Come in. Watch. Write.

It all seemed simple. I've since learned to be wary of easy invitation.

I first met Ennio Sammarco and Cynthia Phung-Ngoc in 2008 while working in Dance Ireland, though I have to admit I didn't really get to know them then. Not really. In fact, I'd not spent much time with either until this year. So it's hardly surprising that, heading to DanceHouse that first morning, it suddenly occurred that I'd no idea what to expect - of them, of me and of the essay that would result.

What did result drew upon the three days I spent with them as they worked in studio. This was supplemented by a conversation I had separately with each.

Perhaps it was a consequence of no work-in-progress being presented at the residency's end, but from the start I was compelled to explore what most intrigued. And for me, that was the relationship dynamic between both artists. And that choice - my choice - necessarily makes this a personal account. As with any such thing, it does not and never can tell the whole story. I would never claim it to and I warn any and all against such a reading. At best, it may at times offer a faithful reflection of my experience of them. More often, I imagine, it is a contestable refraction into a textual form of our shared experience...but not at so severe an angle, I hope, as would constitute distortion.

Besides that, I've found writing this far more difficult than first anticipated. The reason is simple. Or at least, it may be simply put.

I had encountered two remarkable individuals. I'd spent time with them, together and separately. Listened to them. Talked with them. And I'd become very fond of both, these two artists who I liked and admired, equally and in great measure. These two who seemed so different in temperament and interest. These two who were ostensibly engaged in some collaboration.

I say ostensibly because as it turns out, that's not how it felt. At least, not to me. In the weeks and months since July 2009, I've spent quite a bit of time trying to find a word – or some combination of words - that might replace 'collaboration'. I admit to being stumped.

In the end, what I'm forced to settle for is this: that what I felt I witnessed this summer was not quite a collaborative engagement. Yet it was no less complicated and intense for that. And that's what this essay has attempted to describe – an intense, fractious yet subterranean dynamic. I feel privileged to have had the chance to observe such a dynamic, because it showed how despite all this people *can* persevere in remaining civil and open without compromising artistically.

I wish there *was* a word adequate to describe what lies between Ennio and Cynthia. Something that would capture the sense of the inescapable and the intractable that permeated the entire enterprise.

I guess, if I had to choose one, only one comes close.

Entanglement.

## I

*The only thing I knew how to do  
Was to keep on keepin' on like a bird that flew*

It is the 28th of July, a Tuesday morning. It's just turned twenty past ten and, as I quietly enter the studio, I can hear a Bob Dylan song playing; from the door I can see Ennio. He's on the floor, doing groundwork and body conditioning. His hoodie is on, so I can't see his face as he rolls back and forth, back and forth and forth - and onto his hip.

Back down. Then roll forward onto knee. This rolling, it builds gradually, cumulatively, until finally he reaches a momentum that carries him up and onto his feet. Upright, he pauses. Then falls back, to start back again. Eventually he will move on to neck and head.

When they speak together, they speak in French. Cynthia gets ready – checking the playback, changing clothes. She starts to work on her feet, kneading muscles and joints, then calves. The only breaks she takes are when she stops to apply some kind of essential oil. She does this, all the way right up to the small of her back. Then, remaining on the floor, she shifts into the first of her stretches.

I glance over at Ennio. His eyes are closed but his head is angled intently. As if sensing my gaze, he moves, this time straight forward, flat out upon the studio floor, lengthening his spine. He lies prone, face down. *Roll. Slide. Press to floor. Surrender to floor.*

I've only been here a while, enough for three songs - right now, it's the Story of the Hurricane. But however brief, I can already sense it. A tension? Maybe not. But definitely...*something*. A space between them. A distance they're both tangled up in. One that can't be measured in steps but only detected in the carefully circumscribed separateness of two routines. Two attitudes.

He finishes and draws a grey curtain, covering half the mirror. Soon, he's started with a more active sequence of motion, all limbs, each upward swing of arms shifting the weighty motion of feet. Each alternation becomes more and more noticeable: *shift foot to foot. Right ahead. Left behind.*

We are three points in space. We are not the angles of a perimeter.

At 10.35 he moves to a gentle trotting around the studio. His arms hang inert and heavy, enough to eventually drag him down into a kneeling position. He centres for five minutes before stretching his hamstrings. Only breath, music and movement.

Routines like these, I've found, for awakening the outer body, demand an inward awakening to succeed. It's a pleasing paradox, in a way, one they share in. All the same, a contrast is clear. While Cynthia seems to use the surrender to gravity for her routine, Ennio is different. He will deliberately punctuate his vigorous actions with a forceful stillness. So even though both will momentarily fall silent, his feel like periods of willed dormancy, distinct from her slow-dropping quiescence.

Jabbing at me are a series of semi-conscious questions about movement, being, identity. I'm wondering, as I watch them in their differences, how personality manifests movement. How quirks, habits and traits betray us. And I find myself pondering where the balance lies. Where - between those we make our own and those we cannot help but belong to - do we find a point of rest? Are they ever at peace or always and ever at war? What armistice or treaty legislates the advance of this or any unruly body?

And the times and seasons that shape them as they shape us, the terrain that gives victory to one impulse over another...what of those? What facet of self has this place - this studio, this country - given the advantage to within Ennio? Or Cynthia?

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Days from now, I will sit in Café-en-Seine, a bar on Dawson Street and I'll ask Ennio this. And in response, he'll tell me he came here because of the contrast it offered to ordinary life in France. It offered release, an escape from the kind of artist he is back home, with all the expectations and confinement that that implies. He can't say why Ireland was like that for him. '*Perhaps because it was an island*' he'll suggest, as he sips at his wine. '*Some place surrounded by water, surrounded by elements as if its closed off boundaries are a relief. As if*

*for once you can just know where you are. Not in some cosmic sense but, in a very banal way, just enough so you can say, 'you are in this place.'*

*'It's just an image of course,' he'll add. 'It's just a comment, not really a serious question. But at the same time, you don't have to lose time about where you are – you are here. This is serious. And this is a place where...it's like I was saying before – you can go deeper into something. And Ireland for me, in a certain way, was like 'let's go straight to the point'. Don't waste your time. Just get to the essential. Probably with me, that's where I was coming from at the moment. And also, for me, it was the perfect context for a connection with someone like Cynthia, someone I loved but that I didn't know artistically. One where there's no escape.'*

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Cynthia gets up to leave the studio. Her warm-up completed, she's going to grab some coffee. She reaches the door just as Ennio reaches a wall. I watch him. *Wall to skin to bone.* I sense an almost Saturnian quality in him. In his presence and action. It's strange. It's as if his body – in its lines, its substance – is hardening. Mineralising so much that any flexibility, any yielding softness must be coaxed out by the force of a greater resistance. The image flashes to mind of trying to soften wax between calloused fingers. He's about to start on the floor again, but Cynthia's return interrupts. She has coffee, one for each of us. Sugar. Milk.

It's 11am. The Dylan CD is ejected.

A lull descends as we sit close to each other, paper cups in hand. Ennio rises. He crosses the studio, grabs something I can't see, something white. He brings it over to Cynthia. He turns and now I see it's a slender volume. The title is French - *Dans La Solitude Des Champs de Coton* (In the Solitude of Cotton Fields). As he searches for a page, I tear open a sugar sachet and toss in the contents. I don't even need to stir; it just dissolves. I take a sip. They start to speak. He points her to one paragraph, then another that caught his eye. And all the while, they catch mine. But I've no time to be curious: Cynthia has started explaining to me not only what they just discussed but how, when moving they like to very quickly go through what they already know. So today, as they've already built a phrase, they want to move on. They will move on. Ennio, she shares, is interested in bodily mutilation and finding ways into or through it. As for her, it's usually about exploring a state of mind, one she usually physicalises quite expressively. But now...now she's interested in abstraction. And even though she doesn't quite seem sure how it will come into play, she's brought a wig. Her eyes shine as she speaks. It's still startling – this enthusiasm, this openness that underlines the contrast between her introspective and communicative modes.

*'I have a...vague interest in interpreting an alternate persona.'* She says this quietly now, holding the wig carefully in her hands. *'In how it might reshape*

*how she is and what she might want. I'm ready to find a way, to make the movement...dirty somehow. Messy.'*

As we talk more, it becomes apparent both are seeking ways beyond the expected – regardless of whether that expectedness lies within themselves or a spectator. To find paths - through disruption, symmetry breaks, pattern interrupts - to a place or state where the new and real are, where life resides. Questions of the habitual and what it is, necessarily arise. Questions of what it provokes *when* you do this, not to mention *how* you do this.

But, though this interests me, it's their personal interaction that fascinates. On the surface, all is as it should be between two professionals – certainly, a level of thoughtful engagement exists. Each listens attentively to the other, careful to demonstrate a reciprocity of respect. It is the perfect performance of collaboration. Over some twenty minutes, the impression is one of clarity and decisiveness, an assuredness of a shared direction, if not a single goal. All is as it should be.

So why do I find myself noticing the space between them? And the silence that punctuates their words?

Ennio asks Cynthia if it's okay to draw the curtain all the way across the mirror. So no mirror. *'No problem.'* she answers, as she goes to start their music. They begin together, running through the phrase they've created.

I watch and write.

As they repeat it again, then again, I notice how each time it becomes more exploratory. More playful yet ever serious. And they speak as they go, the only interruption when one breaks away to reset the music. The organic, nurturing fluidity of what they do is appealing. It draws me in. And it's then, at that moment when my guard drops to the sweep and flow of their poised symmetry, it's then that I'm set up. Because when they *break* that symmetry, it's like a branch snapping. It's a drop without warning. A jolt. It slams me back into a sensation of being a spectator, a separate third.

Shortly after, we agree to break for lunch. I depart before either.

I do not see if they leave separately or together.

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When I return, I find Elena has arrived, the video artist invited to film them in studio. I'd met her a week or so before, at some public art launch. On first acquaintance, her demeanour seems dark, as if hinting at a gothic - even melancholic - sensibility. Yet this is quickly banished. Her true temperament is rather sanguine, almost childlike in nature. It's all a little unexpected. Marco, her assisting friend, only adds to the levity of their presence.

In contrast, the others seem burdened. Cynthia sits quietly, reviewing her notes while Ennio, lying on the floor, scribbles as he reads, his little white book placed before him. As they do this, Elena and Marco quietly discuss some technical aspect or other - how they want one thing or the other; possibilities to keep in mind; restrictions of which to be aware. The camera is perched on a tripod. In my corner, I write only what I see.

Marco turns on the lights. The music is set. Yet Ennio goes on making notes, seeming almost oblivious. Cynthia pulls on a knee support then begins to play across the floor, rolling, coiling, twisting and spiralling up, onto her knees, her dark hair falling over her face.

It's only when she slows her pace that Ennio gets up. He changes shirts. She falls into a roll and slides up on the floor, all slow before becoming lithe and agile, her limbs crossing in steps that arc and trace across the surface before her. Behind her, silhouetted against the window, open book in hand, he walks parallel to a pane of glass. Parallel the wall, Cynthia isolates and stretches, letting this lead her on to playing with, then tugging at hair, each pull dragging her body in space, as if the music might lead to some out-of-self state, some maenadic frenzy...

Except it couldn't. Or doesn't. And I can't help feeling no one could, thanks to this new element. This camera. This black eye that has all in view, that takes all in hand. That frames Cynthia as definitively as the window frames Ennio. I see Marco has a second camera now. He directs it at Ennio.

It is three o'clock. Cynthia seems preoccupied; Ennio, mute. She changes music, grabs some water out in the corridor. Ennio carries on, playing across the narrow window-sill surface. She grabs a wig and, using a sliver of exposed mirror, ties up her hair and fixes the wig in place.

She stands motionless. Black trousers. White top. Red bob.

Happy, she goes to sit against the wall opposite my own, notebook in lap, finger pressed to mouth. Her head is turned in just a way that her face is obscured, gone. All I can see is the sharp downward cut of synthetic red strands.

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It was over a week later before I finally got my chance to ask about it. *'It was in France,'* she says. *'I had seen Justin Bond and his work around identity....and for me a wig, this wig - a red wig - it's really like somebody in Ireland,'* she jokes.

She pauses, finding the words. *'It's another identity. And for me, a way of play also. To be another woman. It's really that simple. For me I love to be myself yet to play with identity. So I brought this because for me, it's like coming back to my childhood. Not with the body, or like...trying to find how I ran when*

*young, but more like enjoying the pleasure of creating. So, it's an attraction – these people, this man [Justin Bond] who transformed his body to be a woman. Her performance is performance...a performance between man and woman.'*

Then she'll share something. And even now as I write this, I find myself regretting it never happened.

*'I had an intuition that with Ennio...we could play with this. But he said no.'* She shrugs. A half-smile appears, giving the words that follow a light tone of resignation.

*'He said no.'*

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I turn my gaze back to Ennio, as he arcs in a movement of wrists clasped by hands, arms circling head through spiraling forearm twists and finger coils. His steps so quick and sharp I'm struck by childhood memories of the harder martial styles I've studied. In another corner, Marco and Elena are talking quietly, their attentions focused on the laptop in front of them. It's funny; as if these living performers are less real than their captured images...

Suddenly, the sound of Ennio toppling out of a handstand drags us back to him. We all break up laughing. The shock of his fall seems to remind us how absurd it is to miss real life by letting film glamour us out of our senses.

Our focus restored to him, he begins again his explorations. We three record – Elena with her camera, Marco through his camcorder and I through my notes. I can't hope to capture it with any great fidelity but in the space of minutes I watch this choreographic sedimentation. I watch him layer movement over movement all along, upon and out of the slender bounds of the studio's window-sill. He picks up his book again and reads, strolling back and forth along the frame before arcing out onto the floor. He falls into a tumble and ends prone and perpendicular, feet to frame. Then, back to window-sill to walk again, to be framed there with one foot raised, one wrist to wall. An index finger pointed up; a finger-strike shifts to a quarter punch forward. His forehead against the wall. Trapped. He looks caged. He begins again.

A strange whirring sound jars; Cynthia has switched on the fan.

I've stopped watching Ennio now. Instead, I see her as she repeats a movement or two. I'm always interested by her difference to him – an elegance without a trace of fragility. It occurs that if I imagine his nature as iron, hers seems more that of a strung bow. I'm reminded again how, as an actor, it's so strange to approach this art. This way of speaking that has no need of words, not least here in studio, where it is born.

Cynthia, hands in pockets expresses either concealment or incapacity. Perhaps both at once. She steps with a sprung, coiled, tensile essence. She steps, that one step leading to another and another until it just dissolves into a swirling fluidity. Until her footwork disappears into a lyricism of gesture and posture. And for a moment, I can see her reflection in the window. It's in such a position that it seems as if she is a shadow, a spirit peering across from a small square window in the brickwork across the road.

Her shade vanishes.

I snap my attention back to in here and find her on a chair, a few stray red strands caught by the fan's action. And as she sits it's as if an air of anxiety gathers. As if each shift in weight, in posture, in position communicates a different twist in her story.

Now is when I begin to notice the indirect yet pervasive impact Elena and Marco are having in studio. Naturally, I know my being here also has an effect. But as they enthusiastically pursue their business, it seems different. More direct, more demanding and - even though I know they, like me, are here by invitation - more intrusive somehow. Perhaps it's because composing a shot makes claims on the same dimensions Ennio and Cynthia use in composing a phrase. Perhaps.

I remember how small a camera frame can make the world seem. From my vantage point, I see two dancers who, though they often seem aware of little more than their own being-in-space, also share instances of great resonance and harmony. But lodged between them is that camera, with its black stare fixed firmly on Ennio. Just Ennio. And I know that many who will later see his dancing might be tempted to imagine that this is it. That yes, he and his dance have been captured with great fidelity.

But sitting here, watching this, sensing that almost imperceptible back and forth between both Ennio and Cynthia, I know his dance will not be seen. A dance will. *This* dance will not.

## II

*We always did feel the same;  
We just saw it from a different point of view*

Another day in another studio. It's brighter here. Expansive windows open the space up to the light and the green of trees in the park next door. Air, light, colour, texture - space. Space for all kinds of play. As soon as I walk in, I'm introduced to Izuni, here at Cynthia's invitation. With Izuni playing on piano, a new element will be introduced, one both dancers will play off.

But how to proceed, at least initially? Ennio suggests it be increasingly lively but asks Izuni not to improvise just yet. Not for a little while. He jokes about

how he is Italian, so when he gets passionate he can seem aggressive. *'Don't be shy!'* he says, *'Don't be scared!'* Laughing, Izuni answers that it can be a little like that for the Japanese too.

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Being Irish, a nation with a history of caricature, I can't resist raising it when we talk later. What did he mean, aggressive? And does he think people from any given region have a distinctive combinations of qualities? He pauses, measuring the answer he'll give.

*'I've been living for 19 years now in France,'* he begins, *'and this is something that I had to learn to just say. I was so astonished when people were saying 'why are you being aggressive towards me?'* and I - *I was just talking. I was just trying to share something close to my heart.*

*I think it's a good question...because when I say this, it's like using something that people do. Because you realise in life that people go straight to thoughts of knowledge - You are Italian so this is your way of being.*

*So, even if I don't trust it, I use it, because it's like finding a language. And now, I prefer to say it first, because I can't change my way of being. I can moderate myself but not when I work. And not with passions. And my work is my passion. So when I work I know I can be wild.*

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It begins sedately. At this time, the approach of Ennio and Cynthia in their 'collaborations' – with each other and those they invite to participate - is tentative, gently exploratory and in no way careless. It's not absolutely free improvisation. Rather, it's an attempt to set up the right conditions. An effort to create a form, a structure where talents might interact with, move against, and glance off each other.

It's a playspace.

Cynthia, I sense, is agitated and pensive. Yet the dynamic Ennio and she shares remains quietly open. They engage in a soft-spoken manner; courteous; watchful of bounds. Moving in, through and out of space, they draw near and then pull apart. One minute, they are separate; the next, connected, almost tangibly tied together. Behind them, through clear glass, I see trees and, as these dancers move, the trees' leaves shift and shake. They find pauses of restless peace. Izuni's music, light as the air outside hints at sorrow, an accompaniment to a quiet resignation to fate.

It goes on. It even seems like the wind without is moving the dancers within, just as certainly as those branches, those leaves. It picks them up to drop them, raises them to fell them...repeatedly, it catches their limbs to spin them

round, to carry them up and across this room before delivering them haphazardly to a final resting place – his, an upended chair; hers, tossed against a wall.

Then there's a moment when they both seem caught, hands in pockets. They meander, shy and aimless. Only their bodies are present; their minds are gone, gone on ahead to some elsewhere or when. It's then I get it. The sense of how Izuni's music colours the air and lights this scene entire. Because it's then Cynthia begins to read poetry. And it seems perfect. It seems an epitome of these artforms together. As if I can touch the ties between each: body, key, and rhyme; these arrangements of breath and metre.

And just as I think this, I see him there – Ennio - put on a wig and sunglasses. At the time, it's amusing. But as I write many weeks later, I seem to remember it in another way. As a moment of divergence. An instant when both artists revealed clearly just how far they were travelling along their own way.

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A working process is a challenging issue for any interaction. How one is accustomed to working – the unspoken assumptions, the unconscious presuppositions – can determine the success or failure of even the least ambitious work.

For me, and from the very first moment in studio, one particular image kept coming to mind. It was so primal, so uncommon, I was sorely tempted to dismiss it at first. But there it was. Clear as day. And I could not dispell or banish it. Even now, it rises easily to mind.

The image was simply that of two bulls - one dark, the other bright – equally matched in all respects, tethered together at the horns, pulling strenuously in opposite directions. I felt no innate antipathy or antagonism between these two. All it consisted of was the overwhelming sensation of frustration. Of being thwarted in the free exercise of one's will. And it was the only image that, over and over and over again, came to mind while watching Ennio and Cynthia.

How could this have happened? How could two people agree to shared residency together yet appear unable to agree on what to do when they find themselves there? A little over a week later, Cynthia will try to explain to me her understanding of what happened. She is generous as she does so. And careful. And above all, protective of the respect she has for him and what their experience together here has been. She begins slowly.

*'Ennio,' she says, 'he wanted to get away and not have something to work towards. Me, I wanted to do something in the studio whereas Ennio wanted to find something. For me, I come from the solo. So if I am alone in the studio, it's very hard to be there and to do nothing. It's to wait for something to*

*happen...and it's impossible. So we tried to progress somewhere but it was hard, with tension. It was not easy. So it's right for the second residency, I thought, to invite somebody to create a dynamic between us. Because you know, if somebody else is here, you all start to be in relation. Because of course I had the idea of doing something. I wanted to do something.*

*For me, to dance with a formal line is to find another thing. It's to pass the border, within the work, within the dance. And in the body, I try to find two lines – one is to find my way into ritual, with breathing, trance dance, or a ritual of some kind. And the other is more in the line of becoming more abstract?It's not my habit to go into this line but I'm sure I can go far with it.*

I ask if she managed to explore this. 'Not really,' she responds. Silence.

I ask what she did learn.

*'It was more around the process...no. Not around the process but how to share the space with somebody else on the same level. More on the process of creation and how to be in the same space and trying to do something together. [Pause] Maybe not anymore...'*

We can't help it. We start to laugh.

*'But maybe not, at the same time. Because I'm more clear with what I want to do. And this, Ireland brings to me - a desire to do this. I feel more free here to do something. For example, with this Justin Bond issue, I had an idea of working around the square, not circularly. Like two dancers, cutting the space, having two different spaces – one woman, one man. But inside that space, a woman and a man together, but with transforming, one with a very strange sexual identity. And here, I was thinking, here it's possible to create myself and share a space with somebody. Just like...how I love to be in love. To be in the power of love - not to be in tension. Now, for Ennio, he creates [work] out of tension. But me, if somebody brings me into this world [of tension], well...I can go 'okay'. I can work...but I feel like I want to cry at the same time. And crying...it's not free. It's just like, it's tension. But hey, if you want that way...okay.'*

And even though each has only ever spoken to me with respect for the other, and with the most generous praise, I feel a tinge of sorrow. For both of them. For how this seems to have turned out. I ask her if it came as a surprise. Privately, I wonder if anything could have changed it.

*'I wanted to invite him in to play – look, I'd say, here's a wig. Come with me, come here to play in my world – not like it's mine, but that we had a space to share. I respect Ennio a lot, for his mind, in this space. And I asked him many times – I said, 'if you want to be free, Ennio go. Go outside. I can stay in here.'* "No, we have to do something together" was his reply so it was like...a paradox.

*But for me, I really wanted to be true at this time to my reality. Even though it was our reality because we can't separate. But we're adults. We're forty year olds. I don't need to be in tension in studio to do anything...Anyway, I believe, working with him, I learned patience. In a way, I learned the truth, learned about the reality between two people.'*

Later, she shares a final thought, purposefully, as if secretly she fears that I might side with Ennio. Or blame her in some way. Even though, in reality, I don't think there's anything for anyone to take the blame for.

*'See, I know Ennio more than you. You know him in a certain way. But it was just the process of finding out about somebody who wants to do something alone...but who needs another in order to do that. So he needs me to do what he wants me to do. And I respect that.'*

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Izuni plays on. Ennio plays alone. Yet as he does, in the space his isolation creates, another interplay arises, this one between Elena, Marco and Cynthia. A shot is set up.

As if sensing this shift in power, Ennio responds. He sings, pitching his tone to the descending scale of music, on and on until it descends into something closer to an instinctual vocalisation of angst, a demonstrative sighing. Sighing punctured, punctuated by scattergun bursts of Italian phrases I don't understand.

Yet I understand.

He switches on a fan. Then, he switches wigs, pulling on the red bob his collaborator had worn the day before. Some kind of puppetry or role-playing game begins: the wig as substitute partner. Now, on a chair. Then, across the floor. It's sadly intriguing to see this, to watch him do this. To watch him respond to each shift in Izuni's playing. It's a kind of role-playing that is so different for him; at least, that's how it appears to me.

Inevitably however, he slips back again, back into a kind of fascination with his own physicality. The music's influence declines, it's power recedes. It is becoming once more an abstract accompaniment, less determinative as each moment passes.

I step out for a moment, just a moment. For a chance to exhale. To get some water. To shake off a little of the tension that had crept in, in there, in me. And when I do finally come back, the fan is off, it's raining outside and Ennio is lying on the floor.

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It was the very first question I asked him. How would you describe yourself as an artist?

*'Jesus...' he exclaims before laughing. 'I would say that its deep, because I don't know exactly what it means to be an artist – it's a word that bothers me, a concept that makes me react. Like a cat. It's not a posture, not a role, a social role.'*

I can see the question troubles him. But I push him.

*'Ah, as stubborn? He laughs again. 'And looking for..something that doesn't stop at appearances. When I say appearances, it goes first of all with myself. For me an artist is how deep you go. You can be an artist in a bakery, a gardener, someone who makes this with his passion, who tries to understand what's going on. It's not just a tortured mentality. It's just: I'll do this, but next step maybe I can do it differently and next step after maybe it'll be why I've done it differently. And why I've done it. It's not something tied to suffering. But it's a play with yourself. I think Roland Barthe said something I like very much: 'an artist is like a laboratory mouse that builds his labyrinth himself' Yeah. It's something like that. It can be a game. You don't know why but there is something that comes up, comes from this question. Yeah. It's... Life. It depends.*

*I don't trust methods. I think each question moves you in a different way and direction. It's the foundation of my curiosity: I learn as much as possible. I take classes – ballet, martial arts – because I think even if you aren't specialised – especially if you're not specialised – there is a way. A tool that can offer the possibility of going closer to your purpose. To your aims.*

*Yet I don't know my questions, so I can't decide now what I needed to answer. I don't know what's going on when I'm in a studio, when I see a painting. When I hear a phrase, about...chaos, say - it makes me rebound. And I don't know what I'm gonna use - maybe I'll use ballet. Maybe martial arts, reading, acting. A wig. I don't know. I don't know.*

\* \* \*

Today, Cynthia is the one framed by windows and cameras. She curves and circles round a white pillar, exploring how a body can shape even a hardness that defines it. When in a space, how much is being in that space, exploring that space - how much of that is war? And how much surrender? Are we aware of our strategies of motion? Do we realise what they say to those who watch?

What is traded between travellers in a space? That last occurs each time I watch Ennio watch Cynthia. I wonder this as her body wanders in space and his eye wanders after it.

The human gaze is at once more incisive yet less intrusive than a camera. A camera almost invites deception, almost encourages a conscious, if half-instinctive, manipulation of all its lens sees. It even intrudes on those who are not its object of enquiry, by how it pulls your attention to its machinations. For a moment it seems monstrous. But I don't want to be unfair. I reach for balancing parallels. 'Sure,' I think 'but music has its effects too. It leads, suggests. It demands a response – and even a willed refusal to respond is a response. Of a kind.'

My attention is dragged back to Cynthia, as she rolls upon the floor, flicking her hair in a sweeping arc from floor into air down to floor again. It's a powerfully, unmistakably feminine gesture, one revealing to me my own reflexive response, shocking me out of abstraction and into the concrete. Affirming that power of dance to provoke even those who claim to understand it poorly.

It does so because in truth we *do* understand. Just not consciously. We get snatches of it. Like the recollection of a dream. Like the memory of some tongue that once was mother to our thoughts. All its neglected nuances, all its secret syllables and syntax echo in us. It haunts us. It haunts us so, that despite discomfort or ambiguity...a kind of sense comes through. Enough to ring true. Even when a movement like hers can, in an instant, burn out the corporeal quotidian shorthand I rely upon.

I have to pull away again. I've noticed how Ennio still watches. It's not seemed unusual they work separately at times...but I suddenly sense something else. A shift in quality. A rift. A rupture in the atmosphere.

Cynthia carries on. Her games with properties increasingly reflect a willing, a willing absent from Ennio's idle toying earlier. As if in tacit acknowledgement, Izuni's music has changed to tense and spiralling, sinister and leading.

Pulling on a pair of red shoes, Cynthia plays with pulling up and pushing down a trouser leg. Doing this she peers around pillars; hides behind them; presses against their cold surface. Then she runs, runs in those red heels far and fast until she falls. And as she falls her hair falls too, in a dark mane that hides her face from us.

Elena is filming everything. Everything in frame, anyway.

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Later I have a chance to ask about the camera, and more particularly about how it affected her. Her voice is warm and relaxed.

*'For me it was a good experience, especially since Elena was young. So I'd no complexes about being myself and even sometimes playing to the camera – playing at being an actress! A dancer actress!*

She laughs in such a good-humoured manner, it's impossible not to join in her enthusiasm. I'm sitting here in yet another studio, talking to her a week after everything I witnessed. She's been working with another artist. They are happy. They are working.

She goes on. *'It was nice. Because for the second residency I tried to do something. Actually, with the camera, it was really Ennio who proposed it.*

*But concerning the camera, it was nice to have a frame. I would dance, but I would also have the sense of a frame. Because it was two ways. First day, when we came to the studio, Ennio was thinking – they have their job. And we have ours. But it turned out different. Completely different.*

I take a moment before asking if she worried that she'd sacrificed anything?

*'No, no!'* she replies, almost surprised at the suggestion. *'No, no! It [meant it] was more instinctive.'*

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To me, it was as if she never stepped clear of the camera's aura. Never forgot how it followed her. And why would she?

But then, without warning, things seemed to shift out of order. And despite what she will tell me, at this instant *now*, it seems as if the camera doesn't just distract her – it displaces her centrality. Usurps her lead. Elena, in pursuit of the camera's needs, now directs. Commands. Choreographs.

And as they work, as they move from one window frame to another in the search for that one right shot, they are oblivious. They are lost to all that lies beyond, lost to everything outside the frame of this pursuit. Lost to the wave of branches outside; lost to the sweeping path of a crow past the window; lost to Ennio quietly gathering his belongings and leaving.

Cynthia and Elena continue to create.

Minutes after him, Izuni stops playing and, very quietly, steps out too. The studio is silent.

Elena and Cynthia continue to create. They pursue their hunter's dance, pivoting and swirling around the camera's still, dark, centred gaze.

Cynthia stands on a window-sill. As if to match the strength of her presence, the wind outside picks up, catching leaves. She rolls up a single trouser leg, tugs it up, right up to her thigh. The rain begins to fall heavier now. She stands motionless, lightly silhouetted.

I'm not sure what she's going to do. I'm not even sure she knows either.

A pause.

Maybe she's reconsidering..? Maybe she's thinking better of...

It's then she does it. She leaps, out and into the air, off the window-sill. Still in those heels.

I can't imagine how she can possibly land well in them.

She lands in them. With balance and power and poise. And God, I can't blame her smiling a smile of joy and relief. I smile, then, too. I want this to last. This moment of risk and gain reconciled.

*'I need a closer shot.'* Elena wants her to do it again.

Then: *'Just the feet.'*

Then: *'Hands.'*

Then: *'Calves.'*

Then, eventually, even these body parts become superfluous, extraneous, unnecessary.

Cynthia steps out of her shoes. First one foot, then the other; then, she steps away and away until I imagine only the red shoes left in frame. I imagine nothing living remain in frame.

### III

*And I was standin' on the side of the road*

*Rain fallin' on my shoes*

*Heading out for the East Coast*

*Lord knows I've paid some dues gettin' through...Tangled up in blue.*

My final day in studio is less than complete. Admittedly, that's not helped by my being an hour and a half late. I arrive in the middle of another shoot by Elena. Ennio and Cynthia offer a brief welcome. They're in the thick of it. Yet even though they appear tense, I have to admit to feeling happy seeing them as they are now - both involved, both in frame. Cynthia glances towards me. It's as if she wants to say something.

She says nothing. Not now. Later. Later she will tell me: *'I met the ocean.'*

It's a phrase I remember still, each and every time I think of her: *'I met the ocean.'*

Elena is going for a shot involving a reflection in the mirror. Looking back on that now, it seems almost too perfect. Reflections. Inversions. Angles of symmetry.

And for a while, it's as if the other day didn't happen. And that makes this day seem strange...or maybe curious is a better word. And for a while, it's as if they're involved in a single work.

It's as if the other day didn't happen. But it did. It's just the illusion of a common purpose that the camera lends us today.

All the same, the playfulness in the air *is* a relief. And it's genuine. It arises out of an understanding and sensitivity to the situation both dancers share. Perhaps this is one of the few things they do share, something I can't help finding the most inspiring aspect of all this.

I've watched two artists – two people so different in ambition, scope of action, desired outcome – compelled to share a space. Yet despite the frustrations, the disappointment – the failure, in a way – of this experience for both, not once has either succumbed to any temptation to be less than professional and courteous in how they speak of each other. Indeed, it's more than that. Each has gone out of their way to protect the reputation of the other. To avow their affection for the other. And to express a genuine regret that things could not have been different.

\* \* \*

Now it's nearly over, I wonder what they will bring from it. The residency. Their time together, apart, in Ireland. We're onto our second round of wine and beer before I finally get around to asking Ennio this.

'*Confusion.*'

He roars with laughter. We each take a drink. Then, quietly now: '*Huge confusion.*'

I wait, saying nothing, leaving space for him to fill.

*'This...is a place where the elements are confused, where the elements are not distinguished. And the ocean here is not the sea that I know, it was not the sea that calls me...It's interesting because it provokes you. It's not like please take me in your hand. It provokes you. And you're always witnessing contrast. And this is so curious, so alive. The first day in Dublin, I remember my first image was the Liffey in the morning and it was so in between red and dark. And there were two swans. So once again, I was starting my experience with a contrast.'*

*All my experiences with Ireland go with this paradox. And it's...it's strong. Everything you see is strong. And this is interesting and I think it goes with our relationship with our collaboration. It was hard. Strong.'*

I take a moment to absorb this. I want to get this straight. Do you mean it resonates with how you and Cynthia were in the studio?

*'Yeah. I think that Cynthia was directly connected to the place. You will talk to her tomorrow. Me, I was in a, I was experiencing through a collaboration. It was a lot of information. And, uh, in this position, confusion.'*

*'Actually...I will not say confusion.'*

*'Chaos. I will say chaos.'*