

Men need good reason to take action. Even cowboys. Together with the visual artist Stefan Demming, the choreographer Andros Zins-Browne gives three cowboys in a landscape made of gigantic air cushions plenty of reason to act- they climb, ride, fight with the nearly unconquerable stage material, slip and slide, fall down, clean up and dance all over the place. They dance in classic cowboy attire, complete with cowboy hats, boots, jeans and t-shirts- arms bent hands on their belt buckles. Their dance, however, doesn't create distance. In their postures and costumes these three men on the stage embody cowboys in a real, unironic manner.

The masculine prototype is at the root of the figure of the cowboy- conquering the world all on his own- lonesome, claiming land, fighting, setting things right, cleaning up, clearing away. The air cushion installation created by Andros Zins-Browne and Stefan Demming provides the foundation for all of this. The stage belongs to it when the curtain rises, as slowly to the accompaniment of the humming of the air machines the cushions are filled and the landscape- so unconquerable- takes shape.

At the same time an image of the state of the masculine world today is created. In constant motion, ever tottering, this landscape can only be controlled by the cowboys to a limited extent. They slip and slide inside it, can't get their footing, topple over. Stumbling, falling and hitting the ground- these were the elements of dance and choreography before there was such a thing as a choreographer.

With his choreographic work "The Host" Andros Zins-Browne makes reference to the works Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy and yet adds many new elements, for example his search- undertaken with Stefan Demming- for a connection with visual art and dance and his serious examination of folkloric dance.

(Tom Stromberg, *Theater Festival Impulse*)

The Western genre is born of the social imaginary of triumphant capitalism. At times providing ideological fodder for the myths of industry and progress, individualism and hard work, the Western, more interestingly, often dramatizes the way in which these values conceal a conflict that seethes at the frontier of the civilized world. The Western, like the film noir, or the gangster and horror genres, at its best, articulates a pessimistic vision of the human's ability to maintain a society that manages to both mobilize a desire for wealth and produce social structures that adequately mediate violence.

The frontier becomes a place where man's basest drives find unmediated expressions. At the limits of civil society, and often of the so-called civilized world, the frontier is essentially wild, a territory to be conquered, colonized or tamed. Law, where it exists, is tenuous. Life for all is "nasty, poor, brutish, and short," with little to no value. A bullet is the general equalizer and gold the chief moral currency. The environment is unforgiving, openly hostile, often desolate and barren, a desert. Enjoyment is restricted to the saloon, localized in a game of poker, a prostitute, a warm bath and a bottle of whiskey. Such a world is without trust. One's host can just as soon become one's executioner.

It is this vision of the Western that provides the backdrop of Andros Zins-Browne's *The Host*. Reducing the genre of the Western to its barest elements—the cowboy and the landscape—*The Host* focuses on the conflict between man and environment. By dissociating the elements, the environment—and by implication the stage—becomes an element that the cowboys encounter as a strange and uncanny landscape. Something to be explored through their movements, but ultimately contained and conquered. The stage becomes a hostile force, a place where dance is no longer possible. It is thus encountered as a threat that must be corralled. Comically violating the unwritten pact between the dancer's foot and place, the stage becomes a mutant body. Its amorphous character confronts the cowboys' movements with unforeseen contingencies. No longer a neutral element within the performance, it becomes a dancer's horror. A ground that moves and grows, a monstrosity constantly threatening the dancers' movements with peril. By exposing this tacit agreement between the dancer and the stage, the stage is conceived as something that is not given but made, a natural element that is suddenly

uncanny and that stands outside the laws that normally govern the dancer's performance. The cowboys must make room to dance, just as they clear a space for cattle to graze. Rather than learn how to move on uneven ground, these cowboys seek rather to raze it flat. Their triumphant dance, a ritual of conquest, becomes a figure that traces in its stilted movements the form of humanity unable to adapt to its shifting landscape and changing environment. They dance with comical abandon, blind to the violent resurgence of the stage which they thought they had tamed.

The humor surely lies in their folly. The cowboys' insistence on dancing despite the perilous conditions, their refusal to compromise, their stubbornness in the face of the unrelenting movement of the stage, lays bare their failure to evolve. A force that cannot be wrangled, the stage indifferently thwarts the cowboys' human, all too human, machinations. It has become an environment inimical to their movements, a repressed element that returns to disrupt the coherence of their dance and their identity.

The monstrosity of the stage marks a blind spot. Something that conceals itself through its obdurate visibility. The cowboys continue to dance. The stage swells. We see what they cannot. Their obstinacy poses a darkly comic question: if the law of the land is that there is none, are we, too, doomed to becoming guests who are swallowed alive by our host?

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