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## I Theme

### Body and Perceptive Experience in Motion—' Successor ', Choreography and Installation Project

2012/01/08 Update Writer / Sylvie Lin

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*Successor*, a choreography piece and sound experiment with installation works. Courtesy : HORSE. Photo : Chen Chang-Chih.

Founded in 2004, the 'Horse' is a group of dancers composed of young male graduates from the National Taiwan University of Arts and the Taipei National University of the Arts. Excelling at active, simple yet evocative body movements, they performed in the Joyce Theatre in New York in 2008 and, in the same year, received Taishin Arts Awards in Taiwan. Some members also made their ways into the international scene : Chen Wu-Kang, artistic director of the group is part of the Ballet Tech Company (New York) and also the first Taiwanese dancer to be on stage together with internationally acclaimed choreographer Mikhail Baryshnikov ; Chou Shu-Yi, with his choreography '1875 Ravel and Bolero', was among the topten of the Global Dance Contest in 2009 held by Sadler's Wells, internationally renowned dance theater in London ; the piece was also on the top of the list voted by the audience.

The performance of the 'Horse' reveals to be both abstract and concrete, displayed in their project *A Stair Dance* (2006). Eliot Feld, the founder of the Ballet Tech Company, created the piece in 2004.

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The dancers dance to the Minimalist Music of Steve Reich with simple steps up and down the stairs ; from there, they repeat, reverse, reflect as well as diversify all kinds of body movements. The dancers of the 'Horse' also respectively developed their own performances around the stair as a prop and also a concept (something connecting two spaces or two stages in life). Chen Wu-Kang made the stair a metaphor for life's journey and took 'memory' as his theme. Yang Yu-Ming chose the idea of 'object' and the stair became the reflection of one's desire to get promoted ; he used lighting to represent thresholds in life : some people hesitate in front of them whereas others try hard to surpass but they all seem to be manipulated by some external power. As for Huang Yi, he conceived his piece *Vision* based on the ambiguity of the stair as an in-between area ; he also combined images and the real space by division or juxtaposition techniques, thus creating a surreal ambiance.

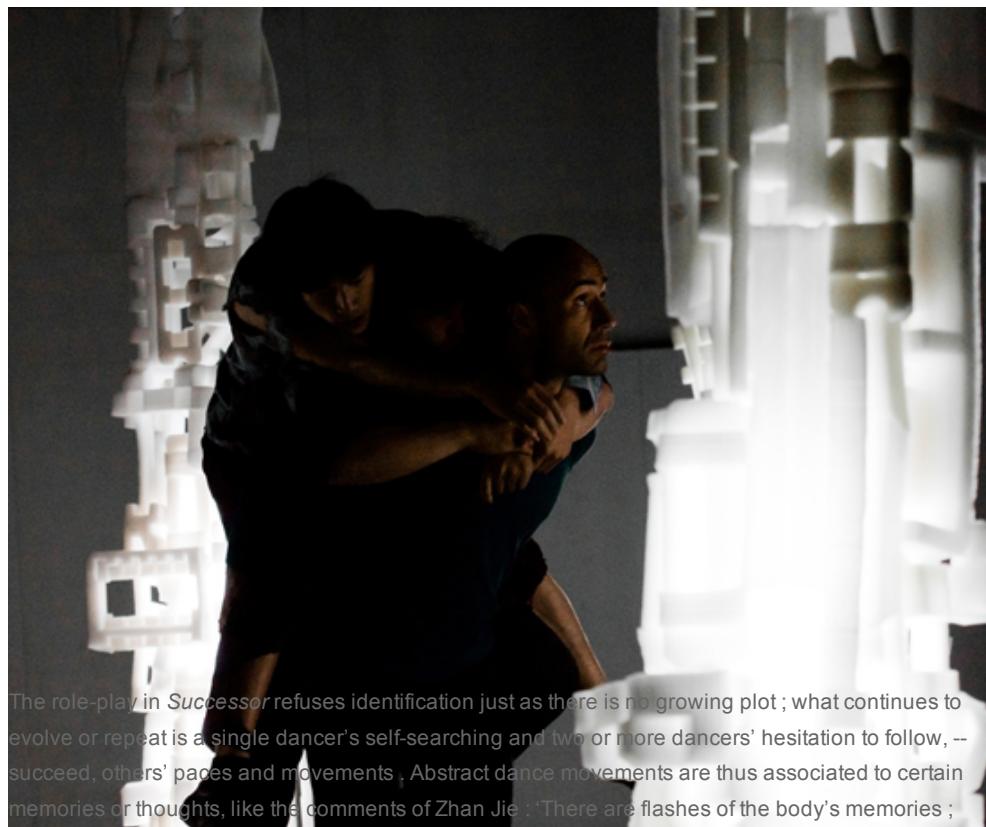


A scene from *Successor*. Courtesy : HORSE. Photo : Chen Chang-Chih.

The 'Horse' and the French sound group 'Volume collectif' present their project in collaboration in the Huashan 1914 Creative Park : *Successor*, a choreography and installation project[1] composed of three dance pieces plus sound experimentations. Among the dancers, there are Israeli dancer Shai Tamir, Mauro Sacchi (Italian dancer and scholar), Huang Yong-Huei (who has collaborated with artist Lin Pei-Chun) as well as Wei Jun-Zhan and Wang Jing-Chun (both active in the theatre scene). Members of the sound group include Yannick Dauby who regularly collects sounds in the nature or industrial environments and began to work with the 'Horse' since 2008 ; Christophe Havard specializes in sound installations and electronic sounds whereas Hughes Germain specializes in home-made echoing devices as well as compositions for contemporary dance groups. As a whole, the 'Volume collectif' explores sounds generated through reverberations of the architecture, based on concepts and methods established by sound art pioneers such as David Tudor and Max Neuhaus. By transferring specific collected sounds or transmitting / generating sounds via the space itself or particular objects, it is possible to create a soundscape with greater imaginative potential, which also echoes with the symbolic side of *Successor*. Here, Tsai Wan-Shuen, Taiwanese artist and also a member of the 'Volume collectif', presented installations reminiscent of industrial relics : information wastes such as chips were spread over the floor alongside structures or steps made of metallic stalls. In addition, the piece also presented new experiments with regards to the spectator : in the first part, there was no seat for the audience ; the dancers performed in different corners in the entire space and the spectators wandered around to choose his/her own position. Such a viewing experience with multiple focuses greatly differs from the traditional form where only one stage represents the center. With *Successor*, the spectators are free to participate and to combine his/her own experience of sight and of sound.



According to Chen Wu-Kang, *Successor* was inspired by the painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) by the German Romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich[2]. The painting shows a man with his back to the viewer ; he perches on rocky cliffs and faces trees and mountains shrouded in mist and fog. In such a grand landscape, the individual appears to be all the more insignificant and isolated, which echoes with another inspiration of *Successor*, as Chen Wu-Kang recalled : in 2008, when they visited the space in the Huashan 1914 Creative Park, he saw Chou Shu-Yi running out from a dark corner. At the moment, he felt the vastness of the space and the insignificance of the individual, as well as the solitude, yet also a sense of absolute security.[3] Exploring one's inner world, a kind of foresight and meditation : these may well be indications to watch *Successor* which also set forth an overall ambiance of dissociation and in-between-ness. Single dancers' movements first appeared excited then became softened ; some seemingly light movements performed in slow-motion require strong tension inside the performer's body. Besides, the dancers show no distinctive facial expressions : neither happy, nor sad, they appear generally melancholic or pensive. At times, the dancers have their backs to one another while turning their heads slightly to cast an oblique look, just as their physical interactions waver between hostility and intimacy. In addition, they are dressed in a similar manner : in the first piece, they were in black suits ; in the second, clothes in gray tones... This reinforces the anonymity of the characters, just as their movements that change incessantly yet repeatedly fall into similar combinations, as if their relations are also reproducible and replaceable and in mutations.



The role-play in *Successor* refuses identification just as there is no growing plot; what continues to evolve or repeat is a single dancer's self-searching and two or more dancers' hesitation to follow, -- succeed, others' paces and movements. Abstract dance movements are thus associated to certain memories or thoughts, like the comments of Zhan Jie : 'There are flashes of the body's memories ; sometimes this also takes place in the interactions between two dancers. When Mauro Sacchi -- tall and hairy shoulder, Mauro Sacchi, Xiang Guo on his shoulder, stretches his knee, leaning on the post, by the immediate, brought back to the memory childhood and memories when he was protected by elders'; 'Like twins, Wang Jing-Dun and Chou Jun-Peng make movements that mirror the others. As they become more distanced from each other, they integrated themselves into interactions with another group of dancers' ; 'Surrounded by benches of various sizes, Chou Shu-Yi sits quietly and, as time goes by slowly, reverses the benches or puts them down, or leans on them in order to drag them around, or to put them on his back like a backpack...the entire scene which appears ordinary begins to move towards some implicit metaphor about an internal state.'[4] Here, the meaning of 'succeed' is thus extended from obvious external succession and imitation to tracing one's experiences and memories, from relations with the Other to successive explorations on the Other-Self.



#### Websites

Horse theatre [www.horse.org.tw](http://www.horse.org.tw)

Chinese introduction to Volume collectif

Official website in French <http://volumecollectif.free.fr/>

#### Notes

1. The dates of the performances : from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2011.
2. Zhan Jie, 'Floating Life and Shadows ; Capture the Existence of Time. On the Horse's Successor' in the brochure of Successor.
3. Interview with Chen Wu-Kang <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyMilkUKnj8&feature=related>
4. Zhan Jie, 'Remember a Body or Inscribe a Memory of Life : Dance the Successor' in the brochure of Successor.

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A scene from Successor. Courtesy : HORSE. Photo : Chen Chang-Chih.



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