

*Gigi Căciuleanu: To dance, or not to be...
Je suis quelqu'un qui danse!*

Book review: Ludmila Patlanjoglu. *Gigi Căciuleanu – Omul Dans* [*Gigi Căciuleanu – Dance Man*]. Editura Institutului Cultural Român în colaborare cu Editura Nemira, editat cu sprijinul JTI și al Fundației Art Production, 2017.



It is not an easy thing to embark upon such an ambitious undertaking as to assemble an account of Gigi Căciuleanu's universe. And as I refer to the scope of Ludmila Patlanjoglu's venture by such a vast term, and not life or

career, my choice of words is, not by chance, intimidated by the richness of Căciuleanu's artistic persona that has, from the outset, singled itself as singular in the world of dance and art altogether. I think it would befit Deleuze's idea of *agencement* to view the concept behind this book as a multilayered, multifaceted assemblage of images, narratives, voices and gestures. The underlying structure of the book walks us through a complex weaving that works best in this almost cinematic orchestration of voices and gazes meant to seize something of the aura that surrounds the complex and variegated artistic but also very modest, generous, and noble personality of Gigi Căciuleanu.

Following Patlanjoglu's introduction to Gigi Căciuleanu's career (his early years of training and success in Romania and his further success abroad both as a dancer and choreographer, from his founding the school of contemporary dance in Nancy, to founding the Gigi Căciuleanu Dance Company in Paris and his time as artistic director of the El Banch Chilean National Ballet), the unfolding of the book consists of an exquisite montage of images, memories, gestures and affects that brings together memorable and pivotal moments and encounters that guided and shaped Căciuleanu's life and career. As Gigi Căciuleanu recalls his seminal encounters and his work with his teacher and mentor Miriam Răducanu, or his partners and friends, Ruxandra Racovitza and Dan Mastacan, his fated collaborations with Pina Bausch, Pierre Cardin, Maya Plisetskaya, the contrapuntal blending of the voices describing – in their turn – Gigi Căciuleanu draws a bigger picture that is never repetitive. While interspersed with Gigi's drawings and poems, and beautifully complimented by photographs of his performances (including his most recent choreographies), the book yields a warm and emotional narrative that the reader witnesses in its making across time and space. Patlanjoglu's ambition in this volume seems rather to set up the stage where Gigi Căciuleanu's persona and art unfold before a reader turned into audience, as if the narrative was itself a performance sculpting in time, right before our eyes. The images and voices are constantly shifting, intercutting and intertwining like a kaleidoscope that catches and renders in a flash what Walter Benjamin would call a dialectical image, a (hi)story that cannot be grasped at any point. Just like a kaleidoscope, this book creates an overall

narrative that constantly eludes us; its images are already past and yet always in the future. Despite that, its images and multiple threads do not displace one another, but rather meet up in their own dance.

"I am a difficult choreographer," admits Gigi Căciuleanu, difficult for himself and for the others; for himself because he is not trying to fit a genre and treats each performance as a world in itself. One has to unlearn each time everything they have learned in order to reinvent something new, explains Gigi Căciuleanu, going on to say that to him it is very difficult not to be in a constant quest for self-renewal. And it is here where lies also the difficulty he presents for the others, since he cannot be placed in any category, he is neither classical, nor modern, nor contemporary, while he is all these at the same time.

Describing the choreography Gigi created for her, Maya Plisetskaya calls it a choreography that is not contemporary, but rather a choreography of the future, while Rodion Shchedrin praises Gigi's exceptional musicality, and Pina Bausch describes him as a rebel, a volcano bursting with energy, an immense talent touched by genius. Recalling Gigi Căciuleanu, her student, Miriam Răducanu remembers being impressed by the elaborate thought process underlying his gestures and movements. Gigi, she says, was considering very carefully the meaning he wanted his dance to convey. To Căciuleanu, dancing is a way of thinking what we see and, at the same time, of thinking by seeing. Just like with the language that preexists the subject in Lacan's view, for Căciuleanu any dance, gesture, or line (hence his obsession for drawing and poetry that, in his view, act like a decanter for the language behind dancing) precedes the subject, announces the subject, produces the subject and is reunited with the subject in a single movement. To him dancers are a world apart, a geography they all belong to, regardless of race or language. Dance is a common ground that opens up the possibility of a common language, but also the imperative of constantly challenging their limits. Which explains how these two aspects are connected when Gigi Căciuleanu holds that the democratization of art is achieved solely by raising the bar, not by lowering it. The need to continuously reinvent his language has constituted a constant preoccupation for Căciuleanu, and also one of the reasons that prompted the global success he has had. That and the fact that

he kept being himself and has never considered 'doing like' anybody else, or trying any trend, no matter how popular. And, across the world, the critics are ecstatic, praising him for his "perfect originality," "utter original imagination," "strong personality combining humour and pure sensibility," the "purely visual fascination" of his dancing, his "refined intellect" and vast cultural background, unusual and stimulating innovative talent infusing the modern dance with a "new spirit". Each time Gigi is performing on stage, "a miracle is achieved" writes one critic, while another comments his unique style that draws both on classical ballet as well as on modern dance. "Everything in what he creates both as choreographer and dancer is surprising in a constantly renewing manner. Although there are many who already try to copy him – says one critic – he is impossible to copy since he is not copying anybody at all."

The final sections of the book bring together Gigi Căciuleanu's insightful meditations on the art of dancing, teaching, and choreographing. Each new performance he works on is a blank page filled in by the movements, gestures and trajectories of his Dance Actors, just like his poems fill in a blank page word by word, line by line in their own choreography and geography of the world around us. His driving force is the ability to create an art capable to reach a most varied public, an art meant to touch and stir the emotions of people, both on and off stage, dancers and audience at once. Gigi Căciuleanu cannot but go on... *faire du Gigi*.

Aura POENAR

Researcher, Babeş-Bolyai University

aurapoe@gmail.com