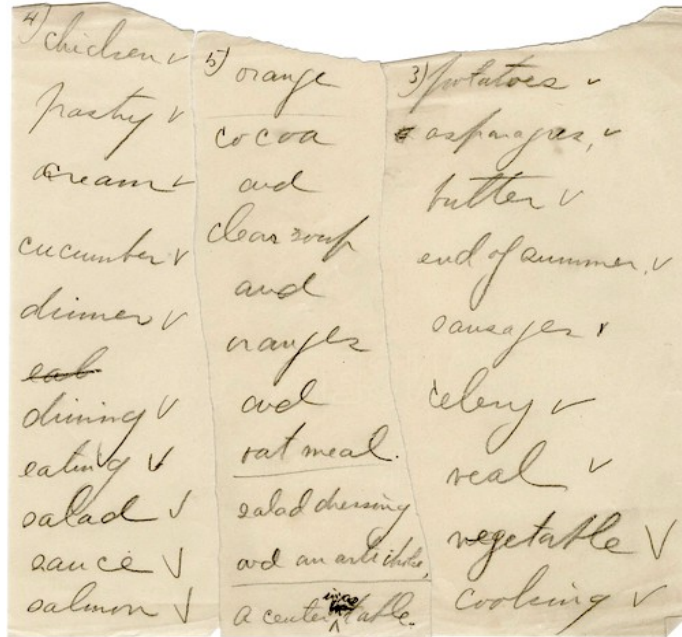


FOR WANT OF A BETTER
presents
PUSH



Tender Buttons Gertrude Stein manuscript

Ingvild Marteim Olsen : mouvement

Annie Hanauer : mouvement

Deborah Lennie : voix

Patrice Grente : son

Christophe Bisson : film

Yoan Vincent-Falquet : lumières

<https://www.forwantofabetter.com>

contact : Deborah Lennie forwantofabetter@gmail.com

With the support of :

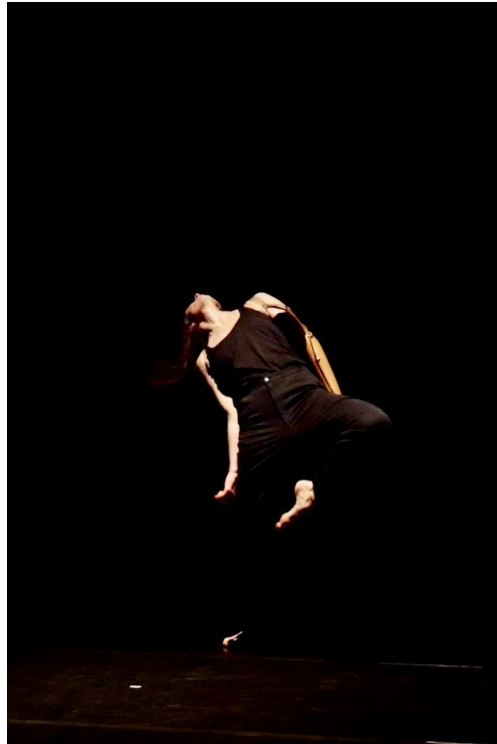
National Choreographic Centre in Caen, Normandy, France.

The Théâtre du Champ Exquis, National Conventioend Théâtre for the Arts and Youth, Normandy, France.

PUSH

Initiated by Deborah Lennie, PUSH is a collective creation freely based on extracts from Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, for two dancers, two musicians and film. PUSH invites us to reflect on the fragmentation of our lives: here we are, thrown into life, we didn't ask to be born and somehow we have to make sense of it all.

In French, English and Norwegian, PUSH plays with the music hidden in language and the dance buried in movement. Like a kaleidoscopic narrative. Like the vision of a fly. Through this fragmented language, we can perhaps catch a glimpse of an escape route towards sensitivity.



Annie Hanauer

TENDER ... but STEIN

Gertrude Stein's writing is considered to be one of the catalysts of modernist literature, and her offbeat approach to language is a veritable invitation to reinterpret reality. "Tender Buttons" (1914) was her first decisive work, and published on the eve of WWI. It can be read as "an act of liberty in the face of conventions, both of language and society"⁽¹⁾. It is a radical, fragmented, liberated form of writing, as pertinent today as it was when it first appeared over a century ago. In both poetry and prose, Stein uses words in a very concrete, practical way, and at the same time she is at the cutting edge of abstraction. In the three parts of *Tender Buttons* - objects * food * rooms - she uses vocabulary from everyday life, but plays with it, turning grammar and syntax upside down, destabilising us in the process. Everything seems familiar, yet nothing makes sense in the way we're used to.

(1) Introduction of french translation of *Tender Buttons* (*Tendres Boutons*, éditions NOUS, 2005).

(2) Isabelle Alfandary in the postface, *Ibid*, p. 89.

The performance is in three languages, so it is perfectly clear that understanding the meaning of the words is not the question here. We're not making sense but rather making sensitivity. We're more interested in how these languages articulate, juxtapose and interact in their musicality, and how the body resonates to this music hidden in the words. In PUSH, For Want of a Better's research focuses on this question of articulation and disarticulation, of language, sound and body as a representation of social questions, not as a narrative.

UNE FEUILLE

Au milieu d'un petit lieu quasi nu
il y a une jolie chose à dire que
le poignet mène. Le poignet mène.

Tender Buttons excerpt



PUSH in-situ Ingvild Marstein Olsen-Deborah Lennie, Musée des Beaux Arts CAEN.

BODY / ANYBODY

In Stein's work, language is fractured like a disjointed body, like a puppet off its string. Hence the very direct relationship to physical work in this piece. Stein's fragmented language, like a cubist painting, nevertheless reveals an off-center center, a sensitive axis, even if it remains difficult to recognise. Here, too, the body is in motion, disjointed and fragmented, and yet it's a body that stands upright, that moves and circulates, we don't quite know how. In a very sober scenography, with just a small half-dismantled piano in a corner, drawn by the light and the bodies in the space, the movement leaves traces in the spectator's gaze, like words on a blank page, and the voice in the ear. The members of a body that juxtapose themselves without grammar, one might say, in a syntax that doesn't resemble us. In what language do these bodies speak to us? we might ask. Recognition/non-recognition. The work of dancers Annie Hanauer and Ingvild Marstein Olsen explores the limits of bodily disarticulation as it meets sound,

space and voice on stage. The relationship between Stein's text, in its approach to language and its approach to the body, resonates in PUSH's work. And the spectator will find themselves gently confronted with questions: where are our fractures, our stammerings? Do I sometimes feel disjointed? Do we really understand each other so well, even when we speak the same language? What is a misunderstanding, after all?



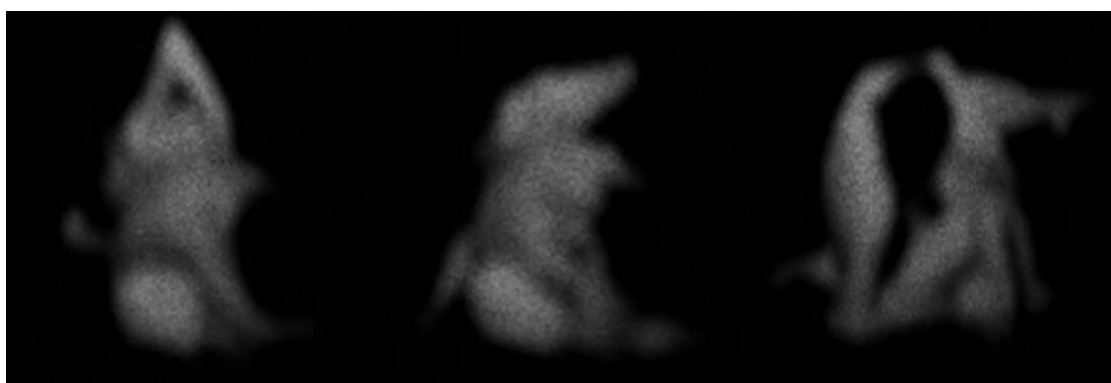
SOUND

In Gertrude Stein's writing, the work on the sound of words takes on as much importance as their meaning, in their rhythm, their "percussiveness", their timbre, their juxtaposition... There is such a musicality in the textual material that the PUSH manuscript could almost be considered a score. Here, it will be approached as such. The sounds of three languages will be present in this piece, each for its own musicality. Just as the meaning of words remains in abeyance in Stein's work, the sound work in this piece will be based on the evocation of a sound universe, rather than the imposition of a soundtrack. Electronic sounds merge with concrete sounds, blurring the boundary between words and music. Almost sound poetry. We try to let the spectator's imagination come to meet the work, and we leave room for it to enter. To not fill the silence. To not dictate what there is to hear. Sound as matter. Matter to enter the body and make it resonate.

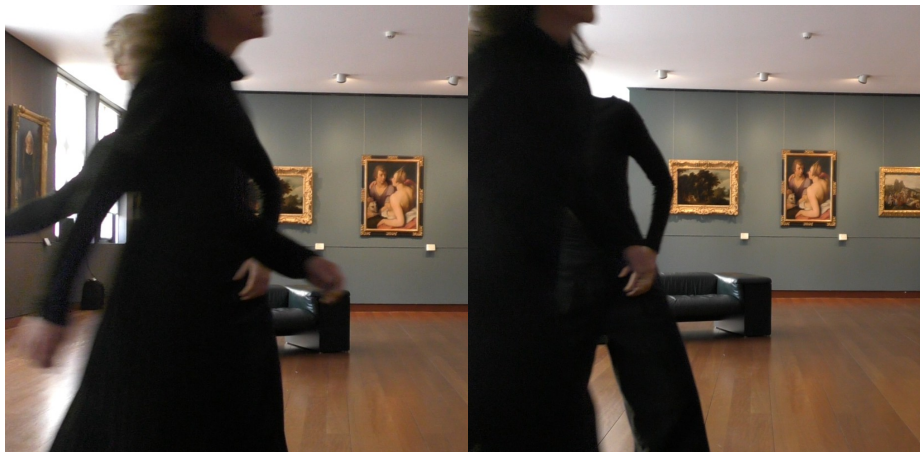
A METHOD OF A CLOAK.

A single climb to a line, a straight exchange to a cane, a desperate adventure and courage and a clock, all this which is a system, which has feeling, which has resignation and success, all makes an attractive black silver.

Tender Buttons excerpt



In PUSH, Christophe Bisson's visual work meets Stein's world both in its imagination and its process. Using the stop-motion film technique, the films are constructed from photos that follow one another so rapidly it gives the impression of movement. There is a sort of resonance with Stein's writing process in Tender Buttons. The film in its very method of fabrication, is both articulated and disarticulated. The viewer has the impression of continuous movement, when in actual fact it is a series of freeze-frames. A collage of images, as it were, which leave us with an impression, a feeling, and remind us of something we can almost identify with yet not completely. The image works on this notion : can we ever be truly sure of what we are seeing? The film that opens PUSH for example evokes several images, difficult to clearly identify yet vaguely of reminiscent of something. Different people see different things. By using the stop motion technique for some of the films, Bisson also evokes the historical aspect underlying this performance. The techniques of stop motion were being used at the time, photography becoming film.



ET BLAD

I midten av et lite, nesten nakent sted er
det en pen ting å si at håndleddet fører.
Håndleddet leder.

Tender Buttons was published in the year of the declaration of WW1. The western world was exploding. Stein, as though sensing this geo-political tension, was doing to language what was being done to the world. The PUSH project is an encounter with this intriguing text from 1914 that leaves room for the spectator and his or her own imagination. The political implications of the questions that arise are obvious. Stein, through her writing and her person, challenges us with notions of belonging and identity, rejecting any standardised form of representation of reality. So how do we articulate our differences? Must we all become the same ? How are we similar, familiar, strange? And how do we make sense of the social fractures in which we live today? PUSH gently invites viewers to question their own lives in relation to these fundamental issues, and just to feel the PUSH towards sensitivity.

