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# MAL PELO

Bòlit\_LaRambla  
Bòlit\_PouRodó



# THE BLUEBIRD CALL

## MAL PELO

Mal Pelo, whose artistic co-directors are Pep Ramis and María Muñoz, is a creative performance group formed in 1989. It is characterized by its shared authorship, based on the dialogue they establish with artists from different disciplines (dance, philosophy, music, audiovisual arts...).

Throughout its long career it has developed its own artistic language through movement and the creation of compositions that include texts, original soundtracks, live music, the design of sets, lighting and video, among other performance tools. The symbiosis between all these encourages us to perceive the space through a unique and attentive listening to bodies and objects, creating a personal universe that features an amalgamation of movements and stimuli. This turns their work into a kind of dance-essay, to be understood through a dialogue between the body, the text and sound.

María Muñoz and Pep Ramis have found, on stage, an ideal place to channel their need to experiment, ask questions and share the themes that have been vital to their work.

«A continual workshop on ellipsis, subtraction, absence and waiting, which form the underlying backbone of the whole poetic parabola of Mal Pelo: their pieces are sleepless nights, on the eve of something, fragile conjuring of a presence, hunts in still-life.»

Roberto Frattini about Mal Pelo work

Mal Pelo has presented, among others, the pieces *Quarere* (1989), *Sur Perros del Sur* (1992), *Dol* (1994), *La Calle del Imaginero* (1996), *Orache* (1998), *El Alma del Bicho* (1999), *L'animal a l'esquena* (2001), *Atrás los ojos* (2002), *An el silenci* (2003), *BACH* (2004), *ATLAS* (2005), *Testimoni de llops* (2006), *He visto caballos* (2008), *Tots els norms* (2010), *Cain & Cain* (2011), *L'esperança de vida d'una llebre* (2013), *El cinquè hivern* (2015), *7 Lunas* (2015), *The Mountain, the Truth and the Paradise* (2017), *On Goldberg Variations / Variations* (2019), *Inventions* (2020), *Highlands* (2021), *De haber nacido* (2023) and *Double Infinite* (2023).

In the course of its career, Mal Pelo has had the good fortune to be able to work with such distinguished artists as John Berger, Erri de Luca, Lisa Nelson, Àngels Margarit, Steve Noble, Nuria Font, Steve Paxton, Eduard Fernández, Andrés Corchero, Toni Serra, Lilo Baur, Cesc Gelabert, Faustin Linyekula, Raffaella Giordano, Baro D'Evel, Leonor Leal, El Niño de Elche, Marta Izquierdo, among others

Its work has won various awards, including the Premi Nacional de Cultura de Catalunya (National Arts Prize of Catalonia), the Premi Ciutat de Barcelona (City of Barcelona Prize) and the Premio Nacional de Cultura (National Arts Prize) for its work both in choreographic creation and in opening up new paths in contemporary dance.

In 2001, María Muñoz and Pep Ramis set up the project *L'animal a l'esquena*, a centre for creation and research based at Mas Espolla in Celrà, Girona. The center bases its work around the intersection of different disciplines and interests, encouraging an exchange of ideas between artists through creation residencies. Its geographic location emphasizes the artists' relationship with their environment, intensifying the potential for new dialogues between art and nature.

## REACHING OUT

### A MEMORY

«Yet to me it felt, and I think to other people there too, as though this dance was occurring for the first time».

“Where Horses Swim”

A conversation between John Berger, María Muñoz and Pep Ramis

One cool afternoon 27 years ago, having just turned 16, when the autumn was still wet and rainy, and it was time to get one's winter coat out for the fair and festivities of Sant Narcís, the patron saint of Girona, I spent some of my very first wage packet on a trip to the theatre. That autumn day, I went on my own to see *La Calle del Imaginero* (*The Street of the Imaginero*) (1996) by the Mal Pelo dance company. I knew nothing about the work or the artists. I remember many aspects of that day: the weather, the shape of the streets, the enthusiastic audience and, above all, the comings and goings on the stage of Pep Ramis, María Muñoz, Enric Fàbregas, Jordi Casanovas and Idoia Zabaleta. Positioned inside a large wooden structure that turned the space into an illusionist's trick, the dancers became animals of all kinds. The liquid, metaphorical nature of the staging, its strangeness, is what attracted me then and still does now. Over the years, Enric Fàbregas has become a bird, María Muñoz a horse, Pep Ramis a roe deer... They have channelled many beasts. Animals have always formed part of the creations of the Mal Pelo company. The dialogue with these creatures opens the door for reflections on presence and language: the animal on one's back; one's back on the verge of animalisation. The company's stage designs feature wood – Pep Ramis and Pep Aymerich do not build wood, but rather they dance it, turning the material into a navigable drawing – dust and snow: snow which places the world in suspension; snow which, as described by the architect-urban planner Aldo Van Eyck, transforms the city into a blank canvas on which children can rewrite its forms. The black stage area (used in the first phase of the company's existence) is a canvas bare of content on which one draws with the body. The white stage area (second phase) is an empty sheet on which video becomes a kind of writing that accompanies the body. Van Eyck argues that childhood is a journey, and that travelling means changing one's point of view. *La Calle del Imaginero* was an act of changing one's point of view. Now that the trend is to hold age-specific parties or shows for young people, I think of everything that has been lost: the process of becoming disoriented, altering one's perspective, and mixing with others, seeking refuge in the unknown. A creation gains value when it offers the possibility of acquiring experiences and concepts through total estrangement from the conditions of life (material, formal and related to perception). This is second nature to the Mal Pelo company.

## A TRAJECTORY

«Mal Pelo is, first and foremost, a territory».

Carlota Subirós, Territori Mal Pelo (Mal Pelo Territory).  
In *Performances de la mirada* (Performances of the Gaze),  
Mercat de les Flors theatre, 2013-2014

*La Calle del Imaginero* taught me that dance is about movement and space. It is a way of being between things and words, an action that makes you aware, not only of bodies, but also of the environment that sustains them. A good friend of mine would call this the “counter-mould” of that which is most visible and identifiable, the counter-mould of that which makes us feel safe. In the case of bodies, the counter-mould is the space between them; in the case of words, it is the body from which they emanate, etc. It is everything that occurs between the gestures that express a particular technique or custom. It is the research and depth hidden among the most familiar of movements! This dedication to research is what gives very single one of the company's works a common thread, a language structure of their own, which we shall refer to as a “trajectory”. The idea of trajectory contains a unique quality and dignity: it is a body and a desire<sup>2</sup> that moves and survives over time, slowly. There it remains, steadfast, but with changing orientations, digressions and shifting forms. It has the sensitivity to perceive these changes, these ripples, including those of desire<sup>3</sup>. It is a body that becomes longing, but also technique and power, a body that shows its resistance on reaching its climax, drawing on this resistance to create a more vital idea of the body. The trajectory travels from one body to another, becoming two, a system of relationships, of love. There can be no trajectory without this system of relationships. This is what it means to watch María and Pep dance, investigate and show their love for each other on stage in equal measure, turning their research and the journey into a concept, translating it into movement. Turning this choreographed love into a love that is scattered and shared, into a community. Finding the energy to be disseminated among children, friends and recurring collaborators. Creating a centre, *L'animal a l'esquena* (the animal on one's back), at the Mas Espolla farmhouse, in order to decentre themselves. Creating a centre of gravity in order to launch themselves. Building a house in order for the research into movement to acquire new layers: farming, olive trees, animals, the rehearsal room, a private space that becomes public at various times throughout the year. A house which, over time, also emerges as an intimate refuge, a space in which to love those who have lost their bodies, but who are still here. As John Berger said in the video *Heaven*: “What reconciles me to my own death more than anything else is the image of a place: a place where your bones and mine are buried, thrown, uncovered, together.” Sharing the image of a place, and burning, together. Calling this thermal and sentimental quality “company”, referring to this immensity as “trajectory”. And, after all this expansion, contemplating each other's faces anew, becoming two again, face to face: *double infinite*. So far away and yet so close.

«Story telling is related with what is not said, and with how you are able to jump together with complicity over what is not there».

“Where Horses Swim”

A conversation between John Berger, María Muñoz and Pep Ramis

## AN EXHIBITION

From that energy of almost 30 years ago – they had already been involved in dance for some years – we arrive at “The Bluebird Call”. When I spoke to Pep and María, I explained my wish to reflect on the idea of trajectory at a time like the present, in which novelty and youth (“young talent”) are rewarded more than ever, and how this leads to an inevitable shortening of artistic careers. There is no time to let oneself be, to investigate, learn, live, transform oneself and bequeath. Creations become ephemeral pseudo-myths, disposable representations. With this starting point a diptych was proposed. There is a large installation in the Bòlit\_LaRambla room entitled *Bosc Tancat* (*Dense Forest*), based on the poem *Separation* by John Berger, which explores how generations continue to wonder about identity and the feeling of belonging to a place. At the Bòlit\_PouRodó venue there is an essay on the idea of trajectory, community and coupledom, of temporary refuge, bearing in mind the premiere of *Double Infinite*. *The Bluebird Call* (2023) at Temporada Alta. The works at Bòlit\_PouRodó put into images everything that I have tried to explain above. They are also a hymn to friendship, to place (*L'animal a l'esquena*), to creation. If dance is action, friendship is *actio in distans*, a movement that begins and continues on a deferred basis when the lovers separate, a movement that is restored with their reunion, an out-of-synch choreography that can only be destroyed by death. The exhibition brings together what time has pulled apart.

One of the works shown at Bòlit\_PouRodó is the documentary *Humano Caracol* (*Human Snail*), by Ixiar Rozas. It is a conversation between Pep, María and the dancer Steve Paxton. Roz asks about death, while María discusses the passage of time<sup>4</sup>. Paxton says: “When you're inside your body, you don't see your age. So the age you are right now is the age you're still going to feel when the outside has changed.” Perhaps this is why we can say that not even death can destroy the choreography that love has managed to put together, a state of perpetual motion as one body dissolves within another. How does the body that has become a vessel of all losses move? As he makes compost, Paxton says: “It's about action and what the body does when it's not trying to express.” Soon after, a small snake is found among the organic matter. “Composting is a displacement activity,” he says. We might add that dancing or snaking is a displacement activity of all losses. The dancer is like someone who makes compost from all the things that happen and have happened, fertilising the earth, making the body synthesis, a territorial membrane. One of the videos of the exhibition shows Pep and María as very young people dancing against the background of *Avec le temps*, a sad song by Léo Ferré that dwells on the pain born from being separated from what we have loved. The feeling is contradictory: seeing two lovers dance their future death. Foreshadowing their separation on the stage, so as not to make it effective in real life. As John Berger says in “Territory”, in one of the videos: “The opposite of loving is not hating, but separating.” This diptych attests to this non-separation, to this amatory journey, to this vast, choral territory, both physical and creative, where we see everything change: our bodies, others, our house, the city's bridges... We, who share everything and nothing<sup>5</sup>.

Ingrid Guardiola  
Director of Bòlit, contemporary art centre of Girona

<sup>1</sup> Those made substantial by custom or technique, on the basis of sectoral expertise, or through the distinction and general taste of the audience members.

<sup>2</sup> “Peninsulas of desire (...), when the body is tired.” John Berger in *Mans* (Hands) (Mal Pelo, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> “Why are you so shy if your hips aren't? (...) How often do you think of me with desire?” *Midday* (Mal Pelo, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> The bluebird is characterised by its bright blue colour and, like many birds of the thrush family (Turdidae), by being a wonderful songbird.

<sup>5</sup> “How old are you winter? (...) We have always taken great care to fall into the next age (...). At our age, the absentees are more numerous than those who remain.” *Vermont Trace* (Mal Pelo, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> “We, who share everything and nothing.” John Berger. Phrase taken from the documentary *Bach Project* (Mal Pelo, 2022)

## CREDITS

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## ACTIVITY

Guided tour to the exhibition  
Led by Mal Pelo

Saturday 11 November 2023  
Noon  
Bòlit\_LaRambla

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Monday to Friday from 9 am to 7 pm  
Saturdays from 9 am to 2 pm & from 3 pm to 7 pm  
Sundays and public holidays from 9 am to 2 pm

Wednesdays from 10 am to 2 pm  
Thursday & Friday from 10 am to 2 pm  
& from 5 pm to 7 pm

Saturdays from 11 am to 2 pm & from 5 pm to 7 pm  
Sundays and public holidays from 11 am to 2 pm

They organise and produce it:



Collaborators:



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