A Panic In The Middle Ages, René Magritte 1927

THE MIDDLE AGES (2015)

THE GREAT INDOORS VZW
ANDROS ZINS-BROWNE

The Middle Ages (2015)

The Middle Ages is a performance for five dancers about a time which is inherently 'middle'- ambiguous, fluid, either both-and or neither-nor. Through a (over-the-top) use of costumes and a rigorous investment in movement, the performance attempts to occupy an ambiguous place and time where historical references overlap and fold over one another. The performers time-travel through history with movement that becomes increasingly layered and abstracted, while the speed of the performance, or rather, time in general, becomes warped. Actions and events are compressed and stretched by the performers, lending an uncertainty to both the historical period that the performance speaks of and the timing with which it occurs. Drawing on sources as far-fetched as time travel, historical costume dramas and reenactments, and theoretical physics of the uncertainty of time itself, *The Middle Ages* asks, not *what* are we, but *when* are we? *When* is now?
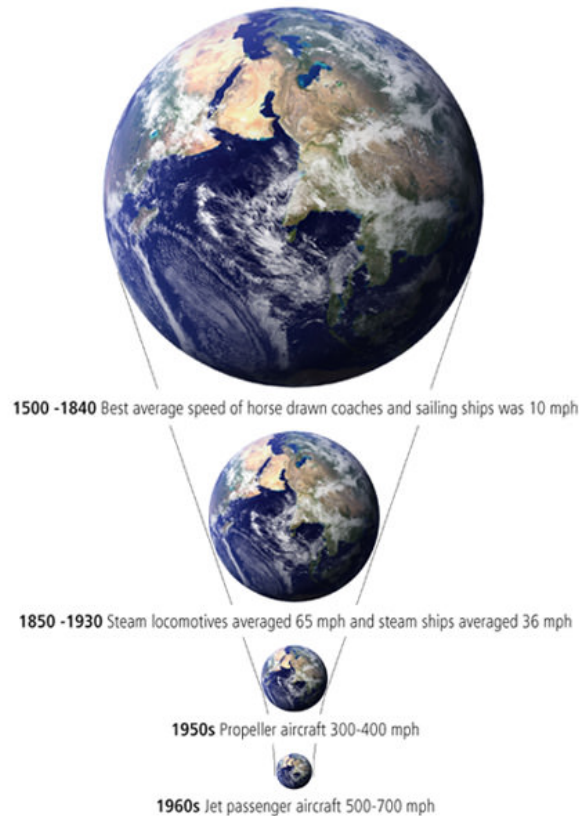
The Middle Ages is a choreography for 5 dancers exploring notions of time travel, warped speeds, and the uncertain position of our own current historical moment.

The Middle Ages could refer to the historical period itself, but for me refers more aptly to Now as a time which is inherently "middle." In this middle period, we are constantly negotiating between a past which has determined where we presently are and a future which we are projecting towards, but where the Now itself has been collapsed. In constant speculation of the future and with a far greater (self-) consciousness of the past, how might we be able to imagine the indeterminate historical position we're in, and what might the implications be for contemporary expression and movement?

This "middle" has not only to do with our current indeterminate position in history, but also our attempt as individuals to maintain an ever-changing "middle" speed. It is a commonly understood belief that we are, as a society and consequently as individuals, speeding up- traveling at far greater rates, following faster flows of information, and relying on an economy whose exchanges are often measured in microseconds. A recent antidote to these increasing speeds suggests that we should slow down, and 'go back' to a slower time, that our current speeds are unsustainable and unhealthy on an individual as well as on a planetary scale. In the ambiguity of how fast we should, or is good to live and move, and in the ways that our speed is linked to our survival individually and as a species, our negotiations of time represent a middle in constant flux. In this middle, we find ourselves perpetually negotiating between trying to keep up, trying to get ahead, wanting to slow down and effecting and being effected by the speeds of others.

What happens at the collision between these two vectors of uncertain time- the one historical (When are we? When is Now?) and the other temporal (How fast should we go? Should we slow down? How fast should now be?)? To propose a time which hovers above past, present and future- a time where speeds constantly stretch, compress or seem to jump backwards and forwards- *The Middle Ages* will derive its material from three main sources. The first is from schools of thought about speed, mainly in the recent philosophical field of *Accelerationism*, that propose differing arguments about how we might respond to our prevalent societal acceleration. The second is from theoretical physics concerning the relationships between acceleration and the bending or warping of time as well as theories which propose that the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously without any privilege to one over the other. Lastly, *The Middle Ages* will borrow, and attempt to twist and fold historical imagery as found in costume dramas and period pieces. The goal here will be to produce an image language of an anachronistic time, a neither-nor time, a time which is defined by its travel in the 'middle' between other times.

With a kinetic time travel both through images and physicalities, *The Middle Ages* invites the public to experience the weirdness of a now where the scientific notions of warped speeds are played out and where the past, present, and future seem to exist interchangeably.

1500 -1840 Best average speed of horse drawn coaches and sailing ships was 10 mph

1850 -1930 Steam locomotives averaged 65 mph and steam ships averaged 36 mph

1950s Propeller aircraft 300-400 mph

1960s Jet passenger aircraft 500-700 mph

"We experience only the increasing speed of a local horizon, a simple brain-dead on rush rather than an acceleration which is also navigational, an experimental process of discovery within a universal space of possibility. It is the latter mode of acceleration which we hold as essential."
– The Accelerate Manifesto, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek

"Human history can be interpreted as a ferocious temporal Darwinian struggle culminating in the survival of the fastest." –*High Speed Society*, Hartmut Rosa

"We are replacing the expanse of the world with speed." – *Grey Ecology*, Paul Virilio

Accelerate!

If we can agree that as a society, and consequently as individuals, we are speeding up, operating within a system which asks that we produce and consume more, in less and less time, then the question arises how we should respond. If we agree that our current speeds of production and consumption are unsustainable either personally or globally, the question arises how can we continue to participate in such a world without implicitly and explicitly contributing to the negative effects of these habits. Recent arguments (most notably Nick Land) in leftist schools of philosophy often referred to as *Accelerationism*, have argued that we should in fact speed up, that only this can bring about a breakdown of the current system and eventually the radical changes needed to imagine a sustainable framework for society. A traditional leftist argument maintains that we should rather slow down, conserve resources and produce and consume less in

order to stave off inevitable disaster. The *Accelerate Manifesto* (Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek) disputes both of these arguments, proposing that the traditional left is ineffective and naïve to believe slowing down will have any real effect, and that real acceleration is in fact what we need in order to produce the scientific and technological progress necessary to our survival and to exploring "the universal space of possibility". It might go without saying that on the other hand a majority of society is not concerned at all with these questions. In these majority cases, it is the *daily* struggle for survival and its ensuing competition- the dream of being able to keep up with, let alone speed ahead of increasingly unequal economic conditions which is of concern.

But what happens when cultures of acceleration encounter (or even cause) other cultures to decelerate, or even stop progressing? What happens when bodies of acceleration cause other bodies to slow down or stop? Besides the fact that acceleration or 'progress' in some regions of the planet is predicated on the non-acceleration, or subjugation of other regions, we face several other paradoxes regarding our current state of speed. If we are indeed speeding up, how come we seem to have less and less time? If we are producing more and consuming more, how come we often encounter the feeling that nothing 'new' is happening?

Confronting these paradoxes puts the individual in an indeterminate position- am I moving too fast or do I need to move even faster to keep up? How much faster is fast, now? What happens if I and everyone else all keep going faster? How much can my speed affect the speeds of others? What are the ethics implied by the speed with which I move?

In *The Middle Ages*, not knowing whether to move forwards or backwards, faster or slower, within the current flow or against it, creates a kind of historical, rather than individual existential crisis; a time warp where slow and fast, past and future bend, slip, and wrap into one another. In this case we don't ask anymore *who* am I, but *when* am I?

<p style="text-align:center">****</p>

In order to derive material from these ideas, I've begun writing scores for what I call "Time Flocking". In "Time Flocking," performers modulate their speeds and attempt to triangulate them (to move to the middle speed between two other speeds), to swarm speeds (to all gravitate towards the speed of one performer or another), and to counter speeds (to try to remain at the 'opposite' speed as another performer).

The Middle Ages is a set choreography with no set duration. The scores which will determine the piece's duration and the timing of its sections, set up dynamic cause-effect relationships between the performers. For example, timing might in one section be operated by one performer, while in another, two performers might operate the speed of the performance causing the others to negotiate their speeds in the middle of those who are leading. Similarly, there should be ways built into the score for time 'leaders' to multiply or reduce, for 'time groups' to form (a group of two follows one speed while a group of three follows another) and/or for time 'followers' to become 'leaders' and vice-versa.

I am still in the research of this, but the scores which I'm presently developing for "Time Flocking" mean that while the movement material (more on that soon) for the piece will be set, convergences and divergences will likely become unhinged in any given performance depending on the speed with which the individual performers operate. In order for these convergences and divergences to become apparent, I am considering a 'spiral' structure for the piece overall, where the piece would repeat and start over again and again from different points. The repetitions would therefore only vaguely resemble repetitions, as -due to the diverging and converging timings of the performers- they would always vary from one iteration to the other.

Like the time traveler whose actions alter events, changes in speeds mean that events which have appeared before would reappear but with differences- the cohesion of events, light, and sound, would essentially fall apart and reconfigure differently through each repetition. The history of the piece would therefore be re-written through each cycle.

Every choreography, implicitly or explicitly, works with time. This relationship is one of the ways in which a choreography expresses its ideology. To work with unison movement set on specific counts of music representing time, to work with set counts of time which are uneven, non-linear, and complex but exist before the dance is set to them, or to work with time as a chance element, all represent different ideologies and conceptions of time and its potential in relation to bodies. In *The Middle Ages*, time is not external to bodies, it dominates but can also be, to some degree, dominated by bodies. Time is a material which itself can be abstracted, rather than the structure in which abstract material can exist. Time is therefore not a fact external to bodies, but a dynamic condition of the relationship of bodies to each other.

"In fact, accelerated motion not only results in a warping of space, it also results in an analogous warping of time." – *The Elegant Universe*, Brian Greene

Timestretch

As we accelerate, space shrinks. The vastness of our planet, of our thoughts, of our possibilities, corresponds to the speed with which we can traverse them. If as a society we are speeding up, and as a result, space is shrinking or 'warping', what would this 'analogous warping of time' look like? What would this do to our movements both real and possible?

In *&&&&* (2012) I worked on the notion of feedback systems, researching the ways in which different rhythms can enter into cause-effect relationships. In a causal relationship, instead of maintaining their different rhythms independently, or synchronizing like a set of metronomes, rhythms would be influenced and influence one another. This dynamic relationship allowed slowing down to cause speeding up and vice versa. In the research for this work, we imagined each rhythmic pulse as a waveform. Faster rhythms had shorter wavelengths, and slower rhythms longer ones. The size of the movement corresponded to the amplitude of the wave. As we tried to visualize the kinds of waves our rhythms were producing, we worked with the idea that these waves could also disturb each other. The scope of this task was focused by the limits placed on the material we were working with- in this case looping. I found that it was possible in this case to establish very repetitive, identical rhythms which slowly diverged and where the different wavelengths between rhythms could begin to 'affect' each other, creating a-rhythmic reactions. In *The Middle Ages* I would like to continue this research into cause and effect timings, to see what effects and affects are produced by the relationships of converging and diverging speeds. How can individual speeds in causal relation to one another produce an experience of 'dilation'- the movement equivalent of the strange experience of pitch bending?

Some clues to this question are perhaps offered by the software program "Timestretch" in which speeds and pitches of sound are separated so that a song which is speeding up in tempo might be made to sound like its slowing down because of the corresponding pitch drop. This spring, I will begin researching what this could mean when 'speed' and 'material' are considered separately in movement and develop independently and/or contradictorily to one another. For instance, when movements speed up, they look differently, their tensions tends to heighten, while when they slow down, tensions tend to release, and the image softens. What would it be to speed up while releasing, or to slow down while tensing? How does speed transform material and could we imagine material which looks like it's getting faster while it is, in fact, slowing down? How might the simultaneity of accelerations and decelerations, as well as movement which looks as if its slowing down or speeding up while it is in fact doing the opposite create a visual "bending" of time?

"***There is no longer a privileged moment known as the 'present'***" – *The End of Certainty*, Ilya Prigogine

"***The distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion***" – personal letter, 1955, Albert Einstein

Moving Histories

In theoretical physics, acceleration creates a warping of time, but at its extremes, it also affects a body's relationship to the present. How might our contemporary speeds contribute to the uncertainty over what relationship we have to our history and our purpose in it? When are we?

If the Belgian Nobel Prize physicist Ilya Prigogine is right, and past, present, and future all exist simultaneously, their distinctions being merely "a stubbornly persistent illusion," what would this look like? What implications could these ideas have not only for The Big Questions of Life, but also for the status of the contemporary and contemporary expression? What would it be to develop a contemporary movement language which does not privilege the 'now' over the past or future?

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To explore this I would like to develop a practice of "Moving Histories"- past, present, and future- both into and onto bodies. What would it mean to move codes of history through and onto bodies?

Any expression, dance no less, is coded in history. Ideologies of form are constantly updated with modes of 'nowness' which influence concepts of how form is used (and not used) in terms of the body. For instance, in many of my pieces, I worked with appropriation. Appropriation can come from anywhere but its use as a strategy in art is historically located, and how it is used is similarly a product of history and ideology. Nijinsky's appropriation of a Faun is historically and ideologically different than Jerome Bel's appropriation of André Agassi. One way to work with time travel might be to appropriate recognizable bodies from various historical times. This will indeed be one starting point for me in *The Middle Ages*, but it's not my intention to stay there.

There are two main interests in terms of historicity that drive the movement material for *The Middle Ages*. The first is how to represent historical periods, not only in terms of imitation and recognition, but also in terms of abstract embodiment (to embody the 1960s should be radically different than to embody the 1210s or the 2090s and should not only be an exercise of representing the first walk on the moon, the signing of the Magna Carta, or the quotidian presence of robots). The second is to ask, how might speed 'warp' these embodiments? What could it mean to warp the physicalities which we produce?

To begin this we will select several historical periods starting with the Middle Ages itself, and then spanning from pre-history to the future. We will work both on the appropriation of recognizable events and bodies as well as on the level of the abstract dynamics of these periods- asking how to physically interpret a historical period into a movement language. For example, the 1960s might not only be the first walk on space, protests, and hippies, but also movement material which deals in abstract, non-semiotic terms with resistance, individual liberation, conventional social norms, lost dazes and/or industrial military (self) control. The idea would be to ask, what is this time about in the language of images, in dynamics, and in character and how can we attempt to embody time beyond simply representing it.

Some of the groundwork for this research was already laid in *The Lac of Signs* (2013). In these cases, Chrysa Parkinson and I created 'voices' with which to re-tell the story of *Swan Lake*. Amongst many voices, there were three which were abstractions of historical periods. These might not have been recognizable to an audience as such but produced recognizably different movement languages from one another- one was "Inventing Abstraction" which was loosely based on highly formal, stylized dance which alternated between symmetry and asymmetry and assumed a rather dramatic quality. A second was "Ballet Mechanique" which was loosely based on the Bauhaus Triadic Ballet by Oskar Schlemmer (1927) but which, rather than appropriating this ballet, assumed the notion of ballet confronting a (from a contemporary perspective) naïve embodiment of technology and mechanics. A third was called "Contemporary" and was meant to be as close an approximation as we could make of what would be considered an abstract contemporary dance- one which we would find convincing and not in any way "dated."

If we can choose historical periods distant enough that their embodiments represent distinct movement languages, and work towards identifying and differentiating these languages from each other, then we can approach creating abstract 'historical periods' in movement. As these languages are established, I would like to see how they might interact with the time flocking scores which we will be developing.

How does speed affect material? What does a 'warped' movement look like? Like the time traveler again, how might the physicalities of different 'historical periods' encounter each other? How can we make a contemporary choreography which feels fluidly dated, contemporary and perhaps even futuristic simultaneously?

Harld ded. willm kng by xmas. hm soon. –text on a "medieval text message" t-shirt.

Marty McFly: ***What about all that talk about screwing up future events? The space-time continuum?***
Dr. Emmett Brown: ***Well, I figured, what the hell.*** *–Back To The Future* (1985)

Costume Drama

To code history 'onto' bodies, I want to develop the project lastly on a visual level with the use of costumes.

In previous research, I often tried to follow the process of exploring an idea on at least three tracks- theoretically, physically, and materially and to test how these areas could feedback with each other. For this aspect of the project, I will investigate (along with costume designer/ sceneographer Sofie Durnez) the use of costumes as a means to develop concrete images of time. As costumes literally code time and history onto bodies, I see *The Middle Ages* as a 'period piece' or a 'costume drama,' only of an uncertain, contradictory, a-temporal, anachronistic, shifting, or ambivalent period.

With Sofie, I will search for the particular imagery of costumes which can best lend itself to visualizing the ideas of time-slippage.

In the research for costumes which will begin this Spring, we will look for ways to borrow historical elements which are either treated, or employed anachronistically. One of the models for us will be "the hipster" -the black hole of contemporary "middle-ness" into which any and everything can be re-appropriated and become once again "hip". It is the hipster who today represents timelessness and a vague sense of when now is, often by combining retro- the more supposedly 'uncool' the better- and neon, nylon sportswear, or some other futuristic signifier together and finding a way to "make it work". Our goal in designing the costumes would be to -with some humor no doubt- fashion bodies which extend the condition of the hipster to extremes- where elements are borrowed from history in ways that seem to absurdly layer and appropriate times over one another. In this exploration where I think there will be lots of opportunity to have fun, we will also need to consider the practicalities of the physical work I am proposing. The image on the body shouldn't over-power the detailed physical work of the body. Nor should the images on the body remain too long so as to produce caricatures. Costumes should therefore change with the frequency that the historical times do.

Medieval Sound, Futuristic Light, and Contemporary Set Up

For the sound, I will begin working with longtime collaborator Peter Lenaerts in June. In our early conversations, we've been most interested in allowing recognizable sound to be abstracted and reconfigured by stretches in time and pitch. One idea is to employ Medieval music filtered through the timestretch software which I discussed earlier.. There is also an idea to purchase several replicas of medieval instruments for the performers to play at moments throughout the piece.

This summer, I will begin discussions with Nick Symons (light and technique) to draw up some plans for our light research and for the seating of the audience. For the light, I'm interested in how we might, with some degree of subtlety, include the idea of time travel into the materials we are using for light. For instance, working with candlelight and techno-like strobes at various moments, and/or LED lights, which can often switch from analogue warm tones to bright primary colors digitally also become an interesting element to research and potentially employ.

For the audience set up, I would like to have a surround seating situation. I want to design this unevenly, however, with risers, as can be rented in any theater, but of varying heights and distances from the stage on stage. The idea of this set up would be to suggest a slightly 'warped' space. This will necessarily be quite simple however. The layout will be designed to permit a full-capacity audience and to be adaptable to any theater meeting a minimum size requirement.

Purported Time-Traveler (wearing sunglasses) at the re-opening of the South Fork Bridge, Canada, 1940

Back To The Future

In my previous works, one of the essential starting points was to ask what identity could be if it had no essence, no singular, cohesive content to it. Repeatedly, in several works, I wanted to say, if this body has no essential identity, no fact to 'who' it is, then, in Rudi Laerman's terms regarding my work, "Give me a body![1]"

In *The Middle Ages*, I would like to shift the question of identity to a temporal/ historical one. If, as our most prominent physicists have argued, the now has no essential privilege above the past or future, and if as many sociologists, philosophers, and colleagues have noted, we are speeding forwards both as a society and individually, without knowing whether or not we should or want to be, then what is the Now? If the Now, can be as thoroughly deconstructed as identity already has, then can time become as destabilized? Is the Now, like individual identity, a space which no longer has any essence, no integral fact but who screams out again and again, "Give me a Now!"? In the absence of Now, what might replace it? Could the absence of Now become an empty space for other times and temporalities to flow in, creating a warped time where anachronism is the new norm?

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[1] Rudi Laermans, "Give Me A Body" on the work of Andros Zins-Browne. Forthcoming, *Etcetera* magazine.

THE MIDDLE AGES (2015)

PREMIERE MARCH 13-14, 2015

VOORUIT (GENT), *POSSIBLE FUTURES*

CONCEPT/ CHOREOGRAPHY- ANDROS ZINS-BROWNE
CREATED AND PERFORMED BY SANDY WILLIAMS, DRAGANA BULUT, JAIME LLOPIS,
KENNIS HAWKINS, AND ANDROS ZINS-BROWNE
COSTUMES- SOFIE DURNEZ
SOUND DESIGN- PETER LENAERTS
LIGHT DESIGN AND TECHNIQUE- NICK SYMONS

PRODUCED BY MOKUM/ MARGHERITA PRODUCTIONS (BRUSSELS)

CO-PRODUCED BY KAAITHEATER (BRUSSELS), VOORUIT (GENT), KUNSTENCENTRUM
BUDA (KORTRIJK), PACT-ZOLLVEREIN (ESSEN), MDT (STOCKHOLM)

PRESENTED AND/OR SUPPORTED BY STUK (LEUVEN), WP ZIMMER (ANTWERP), HAU
(BERLIN), MDT (STOCKHOLM), PACT-ZOLLVEREIN (ESSEN), NETWERK (AALST)

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