



# PLASTIC

**Concept & Direction**  
Meher Debbich Awachri

**Performers**  
Hazem Header, Mahrez Taher  
Hussein Khadour, Maciej Beczek

**(Co)-production**  
Dancing on the Edge 2014 | 2015

## PLASTIC I CONCEPT

### -- The Fable

*A foreign capitalist with a head of plastic bottles; young Arab people; a ruined place invaded by plastic in an unknown Arab land. Everything starts from the satirical image of a boss and his exploited workers... They sympathize with each other, they fight, and they launch a war... but actually all they do, is swimming in tons of plastic. They are strong men ready to sacrifice their bodies and their souls. Like real soldiers they defend their principles, their dreams, their plastic bottles!*

### -- Introduction of the idea by Meher Debbich Awachri

"I write my own plays and I developed a sensibility to practice dance, which drives me to participate and collaborate with dancers and choreographers from different countries. I acquired some experience in Europe, which was very intense for me. I must say that I appreciated this western experience, because it revealed many questions and ideas that were already formed in my head.

At the same time, I found an extract from an article written by an Arabic student (Shafeeq N. Ghabra) that was published in his blog that very well expressed my concern regarding 'some western approaches' to Arab and Muslim issues:

*Something terribly wrong has led the East and the West down a road of mistrust and collision, pulling my soul in different directions. At this point, no region, nationality, or group of people has such a problematic relationship with the West as does the Arab Muslim world. The 'eastern dilemma' is unique: while the people of the East hold great admiration for the West, they are at the same time very suspicious and fearful of the intentions of the West. For a positive turn of events to take place, the West must re-evaluate its assessment of the causes of eastern anger, protest, terrorism, and conflict with a goal of reformulating its policies. At the same time, easterners must confront the religious and political extremism within their societies. Without honest engagement on both sides, the current nightmare will continue for years to come.*

The artists, who take part in this project, are all continuously travelling between their home countries and Europe. And because of that, they are stuck in between. In the classic image of the relationship between East and West. When I just started to work on the idea of this project, I discussed many subjects with the artists, and I realized that they are struggling with the same problems. Despite of their international artistic and professional career and relationships, in their daily life and/or in the artistic community they live and work in, they are still suffering from the same clichés and the same prejudices.

These prejudices come from both their own communities and from their portrayal in Western media. For example, they are looked upon as: exiled artists, alienated artists, Arab artists, representatives of Arab art, the artists of an Elite Arabic art, the Francophone, the Anglophone, the Western agents, the traitors, the servants of the conspiracy of western countries... It is really absurd and pathetic, when we think about it, but it is following them everywhere they go.”

### **-- Underlying thoughts**

In Arab countries, young people seem older than the elderly persons, because each generation passes their disappointments and unfinished ‘projects’ to their children... So the current generation of young people suffer from the heritages of hundreds of years on their shoulders. They are trapped. They try to catch some moments of rest and they try to enjoy, as normal people, the simplicity of everyday life, but the ‘ghosts’ never stop following them.

It is evident that artists cannot be indifferent to all that is happening around them, but what can they do, when everyday life is becoming more and more complicated? All they can do is escaping from an iron cage to take refuge in a golden cage. Or they keep on trying, and in the meantime lose themselves. So that in the end, they find themselves empty. Like empty plastic bottles!

Plastic is a synthetic material that does not decompose in nature. When it is used and thrown away, it stays there and does not disappear. The only way to get rid of those tons of plastic products is to recycle it. Even when we will at a certain moment stop producing and using plastic, there will remain mountains and islands of plastic... It is just a nightmare!

The past is always the first obstacle that younger generations have to deal with. When they make their first steps, they feel themselves to be in front of an endless mountain, that is constructed of ideas, values, stories of past heroes, failures, epic wars, mutilated corpses, blood, legendary beauty, rape, traditions and metaphysical certainties. This mountain has to be overtaken, and this war against ghosts is inevitable. But before embarking on this epic journey...from what point will we start?

### **-- The performance**

The starting point is the ‘here and now’ in a post-revolution country, supposedly Tunisia, where the hope started. With ordinary characters in a popular neighborhood. At the beginning, we hear the voice of someone, who is telling us his creepy dream, in which he had a vision that his son will beat him to death with a steel iron rod. After this, the conflict begins to develop. Things get confusing. Reality sticks to imagination

and everybody gets lost in delusion... to distinguish between themselves to know who or what is real and who or what is imaginary is getting impossible...

The performance analyses the classic conflict between generations. It also exposes the human conflict between production societies and consuming ones, between those who think they are winners, and others who think they are losers. What brings the young people in the play together is the trade of empty plastic bottles. It starts oddly and ironically with a realistic tinge. Everything seems realistic, daily, logical and known. But later on, it becomes surrealistic as if it was a dream or a nightmare.

The place has now an unknown identity or maybe it has a multitude of identities. And the 'play period' becomes the meeting point of all times. The image is now so disfigured that you could hardly recognize it. The characters become lost and aimless creatures, their dramatic lines are unclear, and their bodies are moving, trying to convey a message, but unable to express anything. They are floundering in the world of illogic, although they are determined to escape.

#### *Main theme of virility*

On stage, there are only male characters. They look like soldiers or knights in a bloody battle. It is 'Virility' in its fullest sense. It is obvious that virility includes manhood, power and strength. It is often related to sexual competence... It signifies men pretending to be potent and searching for imaginary success. This virility, and all the values related to it, is still having an enormous impact on the social, economic and political life in all societies.

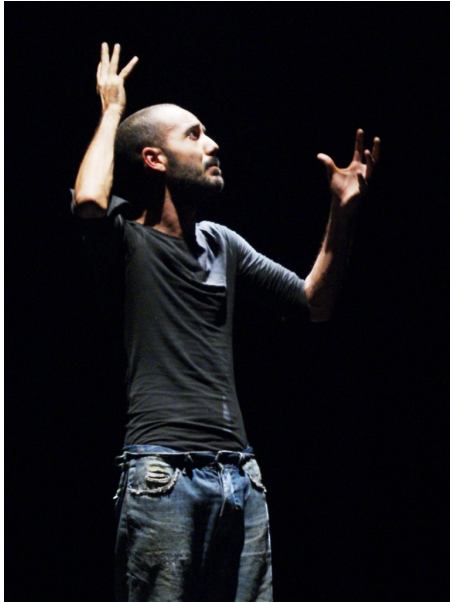
It is not only related to 'the will to survive' or to human nature, but also to the development of human thinking. The relationship between people of the West and the East seems based on strength and domination in different levels (economic, cultural, political).

And because of that we will see that the relationships between the characters are all the time based on conflict, although in different ways. Therefore, the elements of violence, masculinity, sexual intent, primitive instincts will be basic materials for the work. Also, all the situations, the scenes as well the relationships between the characters, and even their movement on stage, will be structured in a complicated way. At a certain point, the main line of the story will be lost, and we must push the spectators to start to feel rather than to think. Through the relationships between "the foreign capitalist man with a head of plastic bottles" and "young Arab people", we will try to look at the West-East relationship from a new and different point of view.

*Plastic* will be a physical theater piece.

## PLASTIC | ARTISTS

### Meher Debbich Awachri (Tunisia)



Awachri began acting with amateur companies in 1997, but already in 2001 he began to work professionally as an actor, director, and scriptwriter for a number of groups. In 2008 he participated in a three week long training workshop with the Royal Shakespeare company, but his main studies were at the Superior Institute of Dramatic Art of Tunis.

His graduation piece there, *D-Sisyphé* was turned into a professional production, and with it he won the 1st prize in the Thespis International Monodrama Festival in Kiel, Germany in 2012. The piece was subsequently invited to many theaters and festivals throughout the world. In 2013 Awachri choreographed and directed a dance duet, *Konn*, a

Swedish-Tunisian coproduction and an international cast.

### Hussein Khaddour (Syria)



Hussein Khaddour was active as a break-dancer throughout Syria for seven years before joining the Sama Dance Group in 2009 in Damascus. He left the group in 2011 to enroll in the dance program at the High Institute for Dramatic Arts in Damascus. Khaddour began working independently as a choreographer in 2012.

In 2013, he made the video dance pieces

*Mood* and *Point Zero*, participated in the Arab Dance Platform in Beirut, and was awarded a scholarship from Dancing on the Edge to attend a three week long professional level dance program at the Henny Jurriëns Foundation in Amsterdam.

### Hazem Header (Egypt)



Hazem Header is a young Egyptian contemporary artist and dancer from Cairo, born in 1986. After a short career as personal trainer and volleyball coach, he decided to focus on contemporary dance. In 2009 Hazem performed for the first time in *It's Not Even Tuesday*, a performance by Mirette Michael, which was shown during the 10th Egyptian International Modern Dance Festival. Not long after, he started his study at Cairo

Contemporary Dance Center. There he gained experience in choreography, such as with the piece *2 Dance Burgers Please*. Alongside, he founded his own dance company called NUT Dance Company, which encourages volunteers and welcomes a broad spectrum of dance enthusiasts from all age ranges and backgrounds.

### Mahrez Taher (Tunisia)



Mahrez Taher was born in Tunisia in 1982, and is both an actor and a director. He has a theoretical background in cultural studies and has been working as an actor since 2007. He has participated in several workshops like physical theatre.

In 2014 he started working with director Meher Debbich Awachri in the production *Hamlet*.

Other productions he played in, include *The Only One* (2007), *Desire* (2008), *The Masks* (2009), *Beats* (2010), and *The Devils* (2011).

### Maciej Piotr Beczek (Poland)



Maciej Piotr Beczek (1989) is a dancer, choreographer, actor, performer and a dance teacher, and is currently working in The Netherlands. He graduated in 2014 from the dance theater department of the Ludwik Solski State Drama School in Cracow. During his education he was able to perform in different dance and theatre productions of Silesian Dance Theatre. His own choreography *Ex Ego* was

internationally well received. The Warsaw Chamber Opera offered the piece a place in their Performance Night that presented work of new creative artists.

## PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

### -- First Phase | November 2014

A residency period of one month in The Netherlands in November 2014. During this period the artists have been working in Amsterdam and Utrecht. After this month, a showing of the work-in-progress was held in Het Huis Utrecht. Several theater and dance practitioners were invited to watch and give their feedback.

See: <https://vimeo.com/114062489> (password: plastic) for the video of the showing of the work-in-progress.

Besides a showing in Het Huis, a sneak preview was presented in The Hague during the Euro-Arab Dialogue Forum *The Arab Future and the Role of Europe*, organized by the Lutfia Rabbani Foundation.

This first residency was supported by Hivos, the Lutfia Rabbani Foundation, and the Prince Claus Fund, and is organized in collaboration with Het Huis Utrecht and the Henny Jurriëns Foundation.

### -- Second Phase | 2015

During the year 2015 a second residency period will be organized, most likely during the summer. Interested co-producers can contact Dancing on the Edge.

## (TENTATIVE) TOUR SCHEDULE

4 – 13 Nov. 2015	<b>Dancing on the Edge Festival (The Netherlands)</b> Brakke Grond, Amsterdam (World Premier) Het Huis, Utrecht Rotterdamse Schouwburg, Rotterdam
14 Nov. – 1 Dec. 2015	<b>Tour through Europe &amp; Tunisia</b>

## ABOUT DANCING ON THE EDGE

Dancing on the Edge stimulates artistic exchange with the Middle East and North Africa. The focus is on contemporary art – theater, dance, music, film, and installations- of high artistic quality.

While the high point of the activities is a biennial festival held in a number of Dutch cities, Dancing on the Edge also arranges performance tours, training programs, workshops, artistic residencies, co-productions, educational programs, film screenings, symposiums, debates and other activities throughout the year. The activities are categorized under 4 headings: 'Festival', 'Exchange', 'Academy' and 'Programming' and take place in the Netherlands, Europe and in the MENA region. Dancing on the Edge is based in Amsterdam, and exists since 2006.

*Plastic* is (co-)produced by Dancing on the Edge.



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