

To Cat and To Coalesce

On Pontus Pettersson and Cristina Caprioli's *att att katt*

By Anne Vigeland

*The cat went here and there
And the moon spun round like a top
And the nearest kin of the moon
The creeping cat looked up
Black Minnaloushe stared at the moon
For, wander and wail as he would
The pure cold light in the sky
Troubled his animal blood**

The cat, which W.B. Yeats accurately points out in his poem about Minnaloushe and the moon, is a self-reliant animal, free of most constraints and highly responsive towards individual needs. It goes here and there as it likes, wanders and wails according to its own desires. The cat is curious and enigmatic, living much of its life out of sight yet strangely close to us. For many, the cat carries a sense of otherworldliness, which is perhaps why it figures so repeatedly in much literary work, including poetry. From John Keats ("To a Cat") to Emily Dickinson ("She sights a Bird – she chuckles") and T. S. Eliot ("The Naming of Cats"), the cat seems a timeless source of fascination and inquiry. Compellingly, these poems have in common that they do not merely attempt to describe or depict the cat in writing, but to grasp – through structure and breach – the way the cat *is*. How it lives in and experiences the world, free from self-restraint.

Around 2012 – at the same time as the cat's peak acclaim as an internet celebrity – Pontus Pettersson began compiling an inventory of his work which revealed a recurring figure in much accumulated material. In scores, writing, images, and dances, the cat repeatedly made its appearance. He decided then to devote a movement practice of its own to the mythical animal, exploring what it may entail to *be* a cat. Not to represent or enact it, but to embody the ways it exists in the world. In Pontus' cat practice too, there is an attentiveness towards wants and itches – bodily, cognitive, social, choreographic. Approaching the cat through embodiment demands alertness and adaptation, and a constant shift of attention. As a practice it functions as an intention as much as a concept or tool, deriving from a desire to experience deep listening from a mortal body that is not one's own.

*Minnaloushe runs in the grass
Lifting his delicate feet
Do you dance, Minnaloushe, do you dance?**

Although Pontus' cat practice has appeared and reappeared performatively several times before, *att att katt* at Hallen combines it with the choreographic material of someone else for the first time.

As the title discloses, it joins forces with the series of choreographies termed *att att* (2012–2022) by Cristina Caprioli, of whom Pontus is a long-since collaborator. Specific and pronounced yet manifold and inexplicable, *att att* complies multiple narratives of and proposals for dancing, and has been performed in various constellations and sites over the years. In *att att katt*, the performers – who are all employed by Cristina and well acquainted with the choreographic material of *att att* since before – are asked to revisit it through Pontus’ cat practice. *att att* is to be swallowed and digested and spat out again as if it were a fur ball. The way this will unfold – the impact, consequences, and repercussions of such a coalescence, can only be formulated in writing after it has taken place. Hence, this speculative text will not linger on what *att att katt* may entail or speak of as a performed event, but rather elaborate on the aspects of its occurrence, its causes rather than effects.

*When two close kindred meet
What better than call a dance?
Maybe the moon may learn
Tired of that courtly fashion
A new dance turn**

In August 2022, Cristina presented a major retrospective of her work at the dance festival Tanz im August in Berlin. During four weeks, 70 performances took place, spanning more than 20 years of working, thinking, writing, and dancing. The scale of the project and its offerings was exceptional, speaking as much of Cristina’s generosity towards her audiences as of her relentless devotion to the expanded field of dance. As often with her work however, matters are rarely deemed complete nor concluded, and so the retrospective continues in Sweden during the autumn. Amidst this laborious undertaking of revisiting the past, of refusing to see time and its unfolding events as a linear occurrence, yet contemplating how that which has been, informs that which is to come – *att att katt* surfaces. This time, the act of returning to a material, of critically examining the ways in which it should be altered or left alone, is situated within a practice that is not her own. The substantial experience Pontus has of Cristina’s work however, implies that his entry point to this peculiar alliance is that of a friend and a fan, not a stranger. The circumstances are compelling: situated amid a substantial retrospective of a singular artist’s work, *att att katt* appears to be both a hijack and a homage – a heartfelt seize. And as such, a closer look at its occurrence and conditions cannot bypass a contemplation on the lineage of its authors.

*Minnalously she creeps through the grass
From moonlit place to place
The sacred moon overhead
Has taken a new phase**

The way *att att katt* is being presented at Hallen, if *att att* is deducted that is, is in itself a revision of a former event – a sort of miniature retrospective. In 2016, Pontus presented a version of his project *The Poeticians* at Svarta huset in Telefonplan, of which Cristina’s organisation ccap once resided together with the production platform Site. Now demolished and replaced by a towering residential building, there are many similarities between Svarta huset and Hallen – aesthetically, organisationally, politically. When Pontus presented *The Poeticians* there, performers employed by ccap engaged in the cat practice in the form of a cat café. Surrounding them was a miniature golf course built up of recycled material from another of Pontus’ projects. The golf course, which the audience were invited to engage with as a form of participatory, choreographic installation appears again – although altered – in *att att katt* at Hallen. Here, the cut-out shapes of the golf course are taken from Pontus’ calligraphic practice/typography *Pancor*, which previously have spilled onto clothes and stencil jewellery, amongst other materialisations.

What this resurfacing of events and projects point towards in regard to artistic lineage are two things: the significance of Cristina's operational capacities when it comes to the support and enablement of Pontus' (and other artist's) work, and how they both tirelessly insist on the value of longevity in connection to their own practices. In the catalogue published for Cristina's retrospective earlier this year, she speaks of this aspect of her work through the term 'entertainment' in an interview with Tone Schunnesson.** She sees entertaining not as in delivering an easily consumed commodity, but rather as a way of *maintaining* her relationship to her work, collaborators, and audiences, as: "a commitment, a long-term caring, incommensurable at its core, per definition incapable of satisfying, at best determined to resist the cravings of the anxious neoliberal hysteria of our time." In Pontus' work too, sustainability is decisive, and constant. Going back, picking up, taking apart, revising again. By refusing to succumb to expectations of novelty and innovation, they share a political advocacy that cares for recovery, durability and continuity rather than marketability and consumerism, in regard to choreography and the politics of production at large. *att att katt* is a prime example of this: it entertains, assembles and reprocesses already existing materials and ideas, within a generous foundation of shared authorship.

*Does Minnaloushe know that his pupils
Will pass from change to change
And that from round to crescent
From crescent to round they range?**

One cannot reflect on Pontus and Cristina's work without also touching upon the significance of poetry and writing in connection to their choreography and dancing. Neither so, ignore their adamant trust and fascination for the irrational and absurd. Impeccably, the project's title is an illustration of both. *att att katt* was conceived due to a simple amusement of joined letters. By chance, Pontus and Cristina found that their separate project names worked excellently together as an abbreviated rhyme. This ability to trust the poeticism of coincidence, to allow for the gentle nudge of humour to initiate or dictate a process, is emblematic of their work at large. It tells of a receptiveness towards the small rather than grand gestures of life, and of an endless curiosity towards that which is beyond logic. How does one become a cat? What does being a cat entail as a social, political or choreographic strategy? What will happen when my cats engage in your dancing?

In extension, *att att katt* directly translates to *to to cat*, which in reduced form reads: to cat, as if 'cat' was also a verb, a doing. The joining and rearranging of their chosen words thus envelop Pontus' cat practice in written language, accidentally. Much like dancing, poetry holds this ability to produce and alter meaning through minor shifts and ruptures. Dance and poetry are related in their constant alternation between structure and disorder, in their compliance with or rejection of organisation, chance and error. This is perhaps why Cristina and Pontus write so extensively – in parallel to or instead of dancing – because the two are so closely intertwined and entangled. To the degree even, that writing at times is the choreography, or at least a choreography. Dance can write, and writing can dance. Still, there is a sensitivity in both Cristina and Pontus' work towards what their thinking and doing asks for in terms of medium and materialisation. It can be a dance or a poem or a play, but it can also be a symposium, a festival, a bar of soap, a cat, a silver coat, a golf course. What this receptivity points to is of course a multi-talented nature regarding output and engagement, but more interestingly so, it speaks of a non-autonomous consideration of dance and all other forms of artistic expression. For nothing is only by and of itself, but constantly informed by everything that surrounds and supports it. And dance and poetry are in Pontus and Cristina's work – amongst many other things and including each other – directly and righteously informed and influenced by one another.

*Minnalouslyhe creeps through the grass
Alone, important and wise
And lifts to the changing moon
His changing eyes**

Pontus and Cristina, the cat and the moon. When two close kindred meet, what better than call a dance. Maybe you and I may learn, tired of our usual demeanours, a new dance turn.

* From "Cat and the Moon", W.B. Yeats, 1919.

** "Between Writing and Dancing – an Informal Conversation between Tone Schunnesson and Cristina Caprioli", *Cristina Caprioli – Once over Time, A Retrospective*, catalogue published by Tanz im August, 2022. Quote taken from page 15.

Anne Vigeland is a curator and producer based in Stockholm. She holds an MA in Curating and a BA in Art History from Stockholm University. She also has a former background as a dancer and has studied at P.A.R.T.S in Brussels and The Royal Swedish Ballet School in Stockholm. Anne has worked as a producer with ccap since March 2022. This text was written following an invitation from Pontus Pettersson in connection to the creation and presentation of *att att katt* in Hallen, Farsta, October 2022.