

**Muscle Beach: Brazilians and Americans Go for the Burn****Slow Down!**

by Deborah Jowitt

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Valdemir Santos in *O Corpo* at BAM  
(photo: Richard Termine)

**E**ver since running and aerobics became popular more than 25 years ago, I've pondered whether people take them up for health alone, or to be able to outrun disaster. Endurance, speed, strength—they turn audiences on too. Brazil's Grupo Corpo could raise even a couch potato's virtual endorphins.

Choreographer Rodrigo Pederneiras's current style, recently cheered at BAM, embodies what composer-poet Arnaldo Antunes—speaking of the score he wrote for *O Corpo*—calls "technological primitivism." In the choreography for both *O Corpo* and *21*, as the dancers ripple their torsos, bounce their every step, and smack the floor with their feet to percussive rhythms, you sense the African strands of

Brazilian culture. But their demanding rituals function in resoundingly clear, often two-dimensional body designs—as quirkily patterned as the ones Alwin Nikolais used to create. In *21*, to music by Marco Antonio Guimaraes, Pederneiras's games with numerical permutations make your eye jump; certain moves pop up now on this pair of dancers, now on those three. The *21* cast members stand still for a very long time, circling their forearms in different patterns until you think you're watching a machine whose every quirk is programmed.

If you saw the company often, you'd get to know each champion dancer. Your eye may be grabbed by, say, a particularly adept male jumper; a tall, skinny redheaded female; a little dark woman who, forming herself into a ball, is hoisted along by her partner while he, improbably, lurches along in a squat. Nonetheless, in this company, the individual body is less important than the group one. In *21* everyone wears yellow unitards, and every woman's hair is dressed à la Topsy, except at the end, when they bounce on in costumes by Freusa Zechmeister as bright as the gorgeous patchwork backdrop against which they've been doing their 40 minutes of far-from-homespun work.

*O Corpo*'s rituals pound more relentlessly, but also foster brief bursts of virtuosity by individuals. Voices in Antunes's score bark the names of body parts and desires amid throbbing percussion, which triggers patterns in the blinking red dots of Paulo Pederneiras's backdrop. P. Pederneiras—the company's artistic and technical director—sets the piece on a red floor, against which stylishly rouched black outfits by Zechmeister and Fernando Velloso turn the dancers into spidery calligraphy. There's no mess to this high-energy corpus: Blood marches in lines; intestines straighten their kinks; the heart maintains an even beat. The evening's first diagonal comes as a shock. "I'm an addict," confessed a knowledgeable friend. I'm not at that stage. Grupo Corpo's work is witty, well made, and excellently danced, but it feels like a quick fix.