

WORKSHOP
AUGUST 22-26, 2005
DIRECTED
BY LOIC TOUZÉ

WATCH THE DANCE AND WRITE

As part of the series of artistic training workshops organised every summer by the Laboratoires, in August 2005 choreographer Loïc Touzé proposed a critical writing workshop based on the interpretation of contemporary choreographic works.

The principle was to get participants writing on a daily basis during the week of the course, when they would be asked to distinguish between analysis and commentary, description and digression, and to invent a language adapted to perceptions of a danced movement, of the context in which it is presented and the story behind it; to write not “on” dance but “around” dance; not to cover with words that which escapes understanding, not to attempt to resolve; to create prolongations, extensions and hypotheses; to differentiate between that part of the work which mobilises the imagination and the part that oppresses it; to dare to offer a point of view, a contradiction, an idiocy; to work without assumptions, without know-how, without specialisations; to let language takes its course, to observe what it invents.

Three choreographic pieces were viewed: *Trio A* by Yvonne Rainer, and *Angst* by Dore Hoyer; *Sorry do the tour* by Marco Berrettini/*Melk Prod. At first, neither the time, nor the author nor the date was specified. The idea was to apply several levels of writing to each of the dances: “what you see”, “what you feel”, “what you think”, “what you imagine”. Some ten young artists and students from different artistic fields took part in this workshop. The texts below represent a few traces of what they produced during this experience.

Participants:
 Emilie Aussenel
 Ava Carrere
 Julien Chevy
 Julie Darribere
 Florent Delval
 Gabriel Desplanque
 Dominique Gilliot
 Herveline Guervilly
 Ayelen Parolin
 Yasmine Youcef

ABOUT *TRIO A* (1966) BY YVONNE RAINER

Herveline Guervilly

“I write what I see”

Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A*. Black-and-white video (no sound), approximately 5 mins, 1966/1978

Solo: a woman with brown hair held back from her forehead by two barrettes.

She is wearing a black singlet tightened at the waist, slightly bouffant (in the 1960s style).

With matching straight (fairly tight) black trousers ending above her ankles.

Underneath, black stockings.

Little black shoes.

The space seems rather long and narrow.

The floor is white/grey.

The wall at the back is covered in grey/white (fabric?).

But the verticality of the wall does not merge with the horizontality of the floor.

We cannot see the edges of the stage.

The space created by the movement is broad and sweeping. Created either by expansive movements or by erect movements along the floor.

Movements: score, very fluid, often only adumbrated, notably a first turning movement back to the floor which seems almost botched. The ensemble is like that: often the movements seem incomplete.

No chronological hierarchy, narrative in the time and space of the solo.

No mimetic movement. They seem instead to have started, rather, from everyday life (articulations, tensing, twisting the limbs: the whole body seems affected: arms, head, back knees... turning, moving forward, moving back, jumping, rolling, etc.) and present what seems like observation, a vision of something.

Indeed, the woman dancer is very meticulous, concentrating hard (gaze lost in the distance with perhaps a bit of acting). Also with an eye to what she's doing, with a certain awareness of the exercise of movement.

Light movements, then, almost as if there was only one: one line, one drawing, an outline (fluid) in space.

There are gestures, like when she is bent low, her legs tensed, and puts her hands along each side of her head. This is repeated several times (while keeping the same idea of sequence and adumbration).

“I write what I feel”

My feelings are already muddled for having seen it four times. I no longer know what is in the present and what is in my memory.

There is also the difficulty of seeing this work through the intermediary of video.

My main feelings: difficulty and pleasure.

The difficulty of watching. People always talk about her lips at the beginning, and I always say I must watch her lips at the beginning. I still have haven't seen them.

And every time I see new movements.

I can't manage to watch the solo from beginning to end without getting lost in my thoughts (no doubt that's also because of the workshop, which prevents me from being alone). But of course it's because of this proposition which refuses all narrative (whatever the movements that might relate a narrative/story or provoke an emotion that “tells a story” [fear, happiness, etc]).

So, your mind can wander: a special, singular kind of attention is required.

I'll stop there so as not to skip any stages and stick with “feelings”.

Pleasure—a lot of it—linked to the dancer's generosity, her proposition, her gestures, which often remind me of childhood (little fools).

Childhood concentration on executing a dance movement or even an enchainement—concentration that is not linked to a mastery of movement (even if, of course, there is great mastery). And that, I think, is what makes the dancer generous, the gap that is proposed in relation to the virtuoso movement that is offered with great concentration, application, rigour and simplicity.

Because (in principle) it says nothing other than what it shows, the solo leaves me fully present and responsible before it; I have to establish my position and work on my story, my imaginary.

I am moved by this place I am offered.

I also think of that when writing, but I am not capable of writing, of saying “what I feel”, when I see, when I witness the proposition—that surely isn't the right word order.

“I write what I think”

Yvonne Rainer, *Trio A* “*The mind is the muscle. Part 1*”, 1966/78

There is this movement that I can't put down in writing; I think she moves with small movements of the feet and hands, the wrists—the hands are horizontal—she does it forward and backward. It always reminds me of Michael Jackson.

I always love this moment. I don't really know why.



I think she plays on the simple pleasures of movement.
Rolling backwards and falling to the side.
And on difficulty, too: standing with one foot slightly raised.

The sensation or the feeling of the body.
Of the body in the air and in space.
On the body's humour in the air and in space.

And this named link between thought and the moving body,
muscle.

A position that is no doubt fairly deliberate of the consciousness
of the moving body in the air, the space.

As much as the body, there is the air, the emptiness around
her.

"Drawing on the Imaginary"

(Where is this body before me leading me?)

To my childhood. A few years of classical dance that I don't remember, apart from the fact that a few years later I saw a photo at my grandparents' place showing an end-of-year performance. While all the little girls in it have open arms, mine are joined over my head. I am wearing a white tutu, the others are all blue. But I am concentrating hard.

Y. Rainer invites me to see movements that I have surely already made, or that I have seen being made in everyday situations.

It shows them to me out of context, end to end, without cause or finality, but I recognise them, often I laugh because I can see them happening, and remember what it feels like to "do that", and who I've already seen doing that.

And this act of recognition takes me back to the common, the held-in-common (to public, community space). It is the pleasure of miming, the pleasure of identifying a way of perceiving the other and identifying with them. Of sharing with the other, of wanting to share.

Emilie Aussel

What I see

Arms swing around the belly and back, really letting go.
Later, arms swinging around while the dancer balances on one foot and then on another.

She is seen in profile, on the left of the stage, looking out. Her left foot points down at the floor and shapes arcs, bouncing gently off the floor at regular intervals. She does something with her head. Likewise on the right.

She holds out her two arms in front of her and the body uses this impulsion to change axis. As a result, her figure is oriented towards the ceiling. Just once, her face appears to us from this angle with the neck very prominent.

Her left fist forward at the level of her midriff, arm still. The rest of the moving body performs jumps (like a child playing horse).

The body gets down and slides over the floor, on a side, then she gathers herself and gets up.

She does a backwards roll.

She frequently opens wide her arms and swings her body around her pelvis.

Bending at the knee, arms parallel to the floor, held out, beating the air.

The ending is singular. The movement stops: the body is still, right foot backwards, a point. Her back is towards us.

What I feel

The continuous stretching and the concentration (as can be seen from the facial expression) of the dancer are powerfully present. They induce a feeling of constancy and fluidity.

The body's élan and the effort to fully occupy the space by incessant trajectories evoke a sense of amplitude, an unfolding. Responsiveness and ease serve the heightened attention to the details of the gestures, to the gestures of detail.

Play and lightness are also vital elements of this piece, as are the complexity and vivacity of the sequences. The amusement of the exercise.

The dancer's body and mind seem to me to be caught up in a dual dynamic between density and constraint. This reveals a questioning of the nature of movement, of what it can be and of its possible openness.

What I think

Immediately, I think of a choreographic style from a certain period, something dated that to some degree keeps me from grasping the expression of this piece.

It is difficult to criticise, to reject a historic work (no, this is not about rejection).

Still, I can say, admit that as things are today I feel no particular affinity with this one.



The Mind is a Muscle. The title would be very fitting. Being active, the activity of thinking, transmitting thought. Thinking the space, the spacing of limbs, the space of one's body in a given place. An idea of measure, perhaps.

To what extent is a commentary formulated. Or rather, to what extent this is a commentary.

Another thing. This capture reminds me of the videos of Bruce Nauman. The ones where he explores the space of his studio. He engages in an absurd repetition of gesture, of a trajectory. A repetition that empties the action of any specific meaning but that creates a burlesque repetition and acute corporeal presence. I feel closer to that particular work.

The difficulty for me is writing about a piece that, *a priori*, doesn't touch me, but, after all this looking and exhaustiveness exhausts and intrigues me even though I still can't get inside it. Doesn't this kind of piece deliberately seek to distance the spectator?

I would like to be fascinated. The composite aridity of the movements and the space of the performance evacuate nearly all fictionality. That's what's missing, for me.

What I imagine

A child skipping in the woods. She has her dog on the lead but is dreaming of a pony. Impatient to be taken to the riding centre, she bestrides Michael and trots. Michael is the dog's name, in homage to her favourite singer, not George but Michael. She loves to imitate Michael, not the dog, of course, but the artist. Michael the dog stirs and struggles. She is a bit heavy, the little girl is. Yvonne jumps off and stands clear of Michael. They continue their walk.

A few years later, Yvonne comes back to the wood. She is alone. Michael has died. "He jumped off the terrace of the apartment." That's what Mum said.

She doesn't believe her and suspects her brother, who at the time had doubts about the density of air. He must have thrown Michael off, sure that he would float.

Yvonne has become a tightrope walker. She hops and often adopts the posture of the flamingo.

Ever since Michael died, nearly eight years ago, she has held her face up to the sky. She doesn't really know why. It's a way of getting away from the earth, perhaps, her face against the sky like that.

She walks, feels the ground on which she leapt and ran and rolled around as a child. She recognises the trees.

All of a sudden, an insect lodges itself in her ear. Maddened, Yvonne bends over and shakes her head; her hands beat

the air and her curly hair. She can't hear anything now. She thinks she is screaming but she can't hear anything. At last, the creature escapes. Her orifices are trembling. She sneezes. She looks at the sun, it soothes her. But when she starts trembling again, she decides to do a headstand. It's a tightrope walker's secret: doing headstands relaxes the muscles and mind and gives the body a purer sensation of space.

Dominique Gilliot

1) What I see

I see a woman (I know now that it's Yvonne Rainer) dressed simply in a sleeveless black T-shirt and rather short trousers, which are also black, doing a series of movements, which are clearly choreographed, in a room whose lateral limits and ceiling I cannot see, but whose floor is in parquet (like a dance studio), and whose rear wall seems to be covered with white or light-coloured canvas.

She starts by rotating her arms with a downwards motion, then does a half-turn so that her back is to the camera, and therefore to me, the spectator of this video capture. I reckon it lasts about six or seven minutes. During the time of the solo, she moves gradually leftwards. On the screen, I mean; I'm still talking from the spectator's viewpoint. She also does a series of short steps, among other things, and gets down onto the floor shortly before the end.

2) What I feel

I have a vague desire to dance, too.

There, less, but I know that it made me laugh, the first time. And smile, the second.

I note the absence of a sound track; I suppose I must miss that.

I can feel a beginning of familiarity emerging, not enough yet to anticipate the next step, but let's say the visual comfort of the *déjà-vu*, at least.

3) What I think

First of all, I ask myself, why is it called *Trio A*, subtitled "the mind is a muscle." It's true that a sequence of non-hierarchical movements, small movements, modest movements, that could be a good description of the activity of the mind, made to contribute like a muscle. I can think "Yvonne Rainer" and pee in the same second, for example. That happened to me a moment ago. Yvonne Rainer. Pee. Yvonne Rainer. And in the toilets I was thinking about Yvonne Rainer. I was saying to myself: "Yvonne Rainer does not aim for virtuosity." At a push

I could read her movements as a kind of unknown alphabet. A sequence of phonemes that could form words that, in turn, placed end to end, would form sentences. I could think like that, and sometimes it's fascinating to watch things that are unintelligible. In a way you can always find things. I don't have the weapons, but I can find shapes in the clouds even so. I admit my negligence. I already feel half forgiven.

It must be a dance that is thought because it's not totally danced, or is minimally danced; one can assume that thought will fill in the gaps, the hesitations. In fact, the thought too is really rather hesitant, it already asserts itself in speech, oddly. Twice more in writing.

4).....

I liked it straight away, the Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer. It's the combination of the Old France first name and a surname with an exotico-German air. It would make a great name for a Teutonic electro-minimalist group. But if they were put on at the Pompidou, it would create confusion. No, they couldn't play at the Pompidou.

Yvonne is the name of General de Gaulle's wife, I think. "Rai" as music, with "ner" at the end. Rai-ner. Yvonne Rainer. You can play James Bond with a name like that. "My name is Rainer. Yvonne Rainer". It's a hero's name. Like the Red Army Faction. Romantic and Revolutionary. Completely anachronous. Yvonne Rainer. Yvonnerainer all stuck together. I really like what Yvonne Rainer does, in your mouth when you say it, worse, it's a very European thing to be called. But perhaps she is American. And? How utterly smart to be American and have a conceptually European name. There are lessons to be learned from the sounds of "Yvonne Rainer". The fact is that I only see her dancing without the sound. So I repeated her name to myself: Yvonne Rainer, while watching her dance. Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer. It's very musical, Yvonne Rainer. But while I am repeating her name, Yvonne Rainer dances as if she couldn't give a shit about what she's called. Yvonne Rainer dances as if she couldn't give a shit about being in the middle of dancing. Yvonne Rainer dances as if she couldn't give a shit about being the pretty dancer, and I kind of disagree with Yvonne Rainer on this point. And besides, "Yvonne Rainer" sounds so goddamn good. And me, I really like "Yvonne Rainer", even if I know it will never come to Beaubourg, I mean the German electro-minimal group that doesn't exist, for the moment, I think so anyway. Whereas Yvonne Rainer the choreographer, yes, she does exist, at least people say she does. Yvonne Rainer has proved her existence to people lots of times, by dancing. So much so that I, who would surely never have heard of Yvonne Rainer any other way, I am almost thinking of setting up a German electro-minimal group with that name, Yvonne Rainer.

Yvonne Rainer has not danced to prove her existence to people. Or for me to form a group with her name. But then again... Yvonne Rainer.

ABOUT ANGST (1962) BY DORE HOYER

Herveline Guerrilly

A solo: a woman.

She is wearing a grey tunic that comes down to just above the knees and wrists (a very simple form).

Over trousers/a skirt with panels open at several points—black—above the calves.

Underneath that she is wearing black tights.

White socks.

She has white make-up on her face. Her eyes stand out like two coals.

Her hair is short, black, but not shaved.

She moves in a space that is difficult to determine. It seems circular, or hollow (sketched out by the dance).

It is white and there is no real distinction between the back-drap and the floor.

You cannot see its limits, its edges.

The dance is accompanied throughout by music. Rather basic in terms of its sounds (drums, percussion with cymbals).

Not so much accompanied, more an interaction between music and dance.

The light projects the distinct shadow of the dancer into the white space.

The movements often make circles, or sometimes she rolls and unrolls herself.

A very strong rhythm: dry, choppy, precise.

Dance that is very expressive and is based on and brings us spectators to feeling, to emotion. Because of the music, too, that beats and that imposes on us or proposes—imposes, I think—a rhythm, the same as the one on the stage, which creates a kind of automatic involvement.

But now this expression makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, or doesn't touch me so much.

I can see the fear, the anxiety, I see the Second World War, the gas chamber, I see Pierrot.

I also see an abandonment of the realist, narrative movement, dance that begins with the body and frees itself from thought, dance that both frees and alienates itself, in the obsession with gesture, repetition (but it's more complicated than that!).

Also, "angst" is also, and primarily, "fear". Maybe they don't have another word. Maybe we French are the ones who need to say more in the word, in the title.



Gabriel Desplanques

The stage is grey. Without limits. Perhaps infinite. Over it, a black form standing on two feet or a crow facing us.

She is wearing a kind of light grey smock and under it a black dress with panels reminiscent of the fringes on a Spanish broom.

She looks like Brigitte Fontaine in her short hair period. Same hair, same build.

I think she's dancing for an important event. It's for her mother, suffering from a terminal cancer, that she's performing today. She must not disappoint her. She knows all about anxiety and her fine, nervous body is well suited to illustrating that kind of sensation.

And when she senses the overprinted title engrave itself on her bust, she tells herself that she could stop there and make a very fine painting. But she suddenly feels within herself a wave of power, flowing through her whole body. From her feet to the top of her skull. From the tip of the nail on her middle finger on her right hand to the nail of the middle finger on her left hand. Submerged by a mystic aura, she is literally overwhelmed by a force that is bigger than her and that directs her.

The raised arms stare at the sky. She splays her fingers, almost dislocating her phalanxes. Everything is tension. To supPLICATE, you really have to try. The legs are claws aggressing the ground and the outstretched arms embrace the invisible.

Suddenly, she is no longer one. Her hammering feet want to run while her bust and head don't know where to go.

I see myself as a child. At the circus, when the curvy blonde was made to get into the magic box. The conjuror pushed the boxes and her head went off to the left while her arms went to the right. The woman is in pieces. I cry. Romain consoles me. He tells me there's a trick. Maybe several blondes hidden in boxes, something like that.

But I can't see the trick here.

I'm not crying but I know that once the light goes out Dore Hoyer's legs will run full speed into the corner, leaving her decapitated, infirm bust in the middle of the stage.

Grey, infinite.

Dominique Gilliot

And now, Anxiety. As its name doesn't tell us, this is not a Jacques Tourneur film from his Hollywood period. Anxiety. Fear over the city. You are going to get in a state and your hair will go white at the roots. White hair grows through the middle. The fear of white hair grows through the middle. Fear through the centre to the tips, like the centrifuge in *Four Hundred Blows*. Stuck on the edge, you've really got the jitters, you want a placebo asylum against the anxiety that grows from the centre, from the belly, therefore: that spreads out. A fear that sweats through the pores of the skin. Fear of the pores, but not evacuated, self-generating, a nice little, well-lubricated mechanism that moves in a closed circuit. The fear that starts in the belly, that gazes at its navel, that doesn't like its navel, because its navel frightens it? Something you have never known, chasing shadows, and here I am, watching her shadow as it splits into three, sometimes into four, depending on the angle. Echoing the dark mass of the beginning, which was a real body, with someone in it. Someone who was frightened. Someone who was afraid, maybe, of their own shadow. Of their shadow or their navel, who knows?