

CLAUDIA
TRIOZZI
AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
YVANE
CHAPUIS

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YVANE CHAPUIS

I'd like to talk about your work method—what you actually know about a work before you begin.

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I know a whole lot. In the case of *Opera's Shadows* I knew I'd be dealing with light as a stage tool; this light would be used neither to enhance a show or define a production, but rather would be a scenography in its own right.

I also knew that the piece would make use of sounds that would stand for words, and would mesh with cinema.

YVANE CHAPUIS

I meant my question more generally, in relation to your work as a whole.

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I always work that way, by which I mean that there are always two materials, two main elements and I create links between them. In *Dolled Up*¹ for instance, there was the learning of professions other than my own: ultimately this was the externality of my own work, as formalised

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The photographs and videos projected in the work *Dolled Up* document the artist's experiences in learning professions other

than her own: florist, dressmaker, shoe salesperson, chocolate maker, etc.

Debout texte

SUR LE 4° ACCORD PIANO

AU VISAGE EXPRESSIF

Au visage expressif,

Aux minuscules yeux d'émail pivotants

Sur la figurine de tes Lèvres si douces et blanches, fine porcelaine « fêlée »

Palle et jeune comme tes doigts de fumée

Le matin se lève déjà opaque

Compagnon insatiable de tes délires

Mosaïque aux milles subtilités éperdue dans l'espace d'une rancune

Qui te molesta à jamais.

Claudia Triozzi, *Opera's Shadows*, 2005, extract of the score.

in videos and photographs, together with my activity as represented by the mechanics of staging. Basically these two propositions come together via the repetition of movements, movements carried out by my own body. I need to set up an environment for myself. The work explores the stage, stage tools, a scenography and a volume which means my body can act, which puts me into action. This framework, whether it's the machines in *Park* or *Dolled Up*, the curtains in *Family Tree* or the screen in *Opera's Shadows*, is a broadening of my concerns, a structure that simultaneously distances me from the audience and brings me closer to it.

YVANE CHAPUIS

In an earlier conversation it seemed to me that the form you're looking for is one that would allow the viewer to actually experience the process you're going through when you're seek-

ing a form for what you have to say, do and give shape to. Could you say something about this?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

In the construction process, in the bringing together of two parallel volumes such as light and sound, it's only natural that something should emanate from me—because I'm not the spectator of the piece but the performer—and generate a certain discomfort in the audience. What creates the time frame of my explorations and what creates the time frame for the audience's confrontation with this thing? This time frame is hard to deal with: it calls for a certain relaxation, and a caving-in, and an understanding—an understanding not of what I say but of the piece as a whole. It's the piece as a whole that produces speech. When I'm searching, it's the same thing: it's my perceptions as a whole that make up the piece and this is an unsettling

way to work, because I have to let myself go in the sense of accepting its time frame. The audience absolutely must work, by which I mean work towards maybe understanding the stratification of an experience to be undertaken. My pieces don't contain material that would provide any logical understanding for the spectator to take refuge in. What's involved is a set of time frames that are mine, which I have experienced and which have been compressed.

YVANE CHAPUIS

In your last three works, *Family Tree*, *Stand* and *Opera's Shadows*, the voice has become the principal medium. What led you to give it this emphasis?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I had an urge to say something—not with my body and with objects as in the early pieces, but



Haco & Michel Gullet in *Opera's Shadows* (rehearsal, October 2005, view behind the screen).

to “really” say something. Put simply, this means using my voice. As I’m no great fan of my own speaking voice, I looked for another one. I worked on my voice for three years at the music school in Romainville, working opposite singers who were practically professionals; once again I was in a learning situation, one that really added something to my voice. In *Family Tree* I was faced with a technical problem, because I very quickly lost my voice—I couldn’t last out the hour of the performance. These technical difficulties made me even more committed and I worked on the voice as technique, that is as something requiring certain physical postures and certain kinds of breathing. This became a daily exercise and I was particularly drawn to the forgetting of time and the forgetting of self that it allows. Training yourself to get a given level of volume circulating and to hold a sound makes it possible to really cut yourself off from the outside. Working on your voice is also a matter of vocal power, of amplification, and it’s very agreeable when you’re hooked into your breathing, because that enables a real detachment—I’d go so far as to say a detachment from the world, even if that sounds exaggerated.

The concentration required by working on your own with your voice has to do with the body, but not with the mirror—as can be the case in learning dance—even if the mirror can be useful for certain mouth movements. You sing well when you forget your own voice. With dance I rarely forgot myself. Voice made it possible to address others in a way different from dance. With voice the essential happens in the face, the head and the brainspace. And at the same time, in singing nothing must be overintellectualised; there’s an enormous spontaneity. And with voice there’s a certain obligation to be happy, and I like that.

YVANE CHAPUIS

How did you work with the musicians on *Opera’s Shadows*?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I’d already worked with Michel Guillet on the previous work, *Stand*. I knew I felt like getting involved in an exploration of sound and light, but this time I wanted a more spatialised sound form, by which I mean more removed from the concert form, something in which the volumes of the sound material could be modulated and

contrasted, and the sound would move, sweeping over the space in time with the light projections. That gave us a pretty broad initial scope. So we embarked on improvisations, with Michael working from recorded electronic sounds and me with my voice and sound effects created with objects. During this improvisation phase certain texts emerged, in the sense that they took shape within a given theme and lapse of time. Then an especially difficult part of the process began for me. This difficulty had to do with the different times it took to work up the material. While the texts got written relatively quickly, the preparation period as a whole lasted three months. This was a phase I’d already been through during the preparation of *Family Tree*, a phase that involves finding ways of continuing to work on a text within a fixed structure while still trying to make it develop so as to keep up the dynamic throughout the preparation period.

The sound material gradually took shape in the course of regular meetings and spells of individual reflection. Working with Michael was interesting for the “earthy” sounds he produces and for his ability to develop motifs that grow and saturate, to create a hypnotic ambience—a detached, meditative energy which, up to certain stage, fits very well with my use of voice. I also need melody and more otherworldly sonorities to achieve greater complexity, to create contrasts that allow for spatial opening-up as they magnify my voice and send it down different paths.

Haco’s contribution was tricky because she could only join us three weeks before the premiere. We’d performed together at the Villa Kujuyama in Kyoto during my stay in Japan. She came along with other sounds, got me to listen to them and then let me choose. She gave herself to the work heart and soul—this really was a well-timed collaboration. Some parts we recorded because I thought they were absolutely perfect for me; in addition I was scared by the idea of actually doing them on stage and they gave me breaks during the performance. The period of exchange with Haco was short but very enriching; it clearly had something to do with both of us being women and with a capacity for listening to each other. This listening, I feel, was also linked to such collective forms of training and working as the dance and singing.

Haco’s arrival removed the performance aspect of what Michel and I had been working

on. Now there were three of us and the score needed further structuring in the interests of distributing and adjusting our individual contributions. This writing process allows me to approach the stage much less nervously and in the final analysis gives me more freedom. Collaboration for me is not using someone else’s savvy: it’s a question of individualising some kind of force—one that’s not just artistic—and that’s where the task becomes difficult. As I see it, entering into collaboration with someone involves identifying a potential to work through; this doesn’t mean exploiting that potential, but rather making it your own. This calls for enormous receptiveness and generosity, and a commitment to a given work. I want to continue with this kind of collaboration, but first I want to find the right initial parameters. So far I’ve been working intuitively; what I have to do now is develop not a machine, but a kind of work contract, a manifesto that makes my view of the artistic act within a collaborative framework clear. I believe that a collaborative venture lets you work through yourself and filter things in a way you wouldn’t have done on your own. Collaboration’s a fuzzy, misleading term that could certainly do with some thrashing-out.

YVANE CHAPUIS

What’s the current situation with the *Opera’s Shadows* score?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

It’s on a CD that each of us has a copy of. We also have our individual scores: recorded sounds for Michel and Haco, and texts, melodies and bits and pieces for me.

YVANE CHAPUIS

How did the work actually get organised between you? What kind of pointers did you give each other for working on the score?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

The words I used are not really part of any musical vocabulary. My main concern was how long things would last. When we were improvising this was a long time: during improvisation the bit called *J’aime le brouillon* (“I Like Muddle”) lasted three quarters of an hour, and was finally cut back to five or six minutes. I used a shrinkage process which developed via the composition of initially improvised stuff and which I worked on by ear.

YVANE CHAPUIS

What processes did you use for creating the texts?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

Some of the texts grew out of the improvisation with Michel. Some of the themes made their appearance at those moments, starting for example with a sentence like “I like muddle”. These are scraps of inward, personal themes that echo my own concerns and which I decided to develop in the form of protest or irony. Other themes can be traced back to my reading.

YVANE CHAPUIS

Do you ever find yourself sitting down with pencil and paper and a specific theme to work on?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

Not all the time. *Au visage expressif* (“Expressive-looking”) was written at home on my own. This often happens with the more intimate texts. The phrase emerged from a piano improvisation I’d recorded. Some texts are the result of a confrontation with images—this was the case with *Que ton regard est perdu* (“How distant is your gaze”). There’s a connection between this text and an exhibition I saw of photos of women at work indoors. The text about brick—“non-existent megalopolis with all this pointless future” and “firebrick, drawn from brown slate”—is a tribute to brick and a pointer to my personal situation. I felt a fascination with brick that’s died down now, but which really astonished me. I found myself wondering how a word that had become so transparent for me could name a material and a colour I don’t actually like. So the origins of the texts are varied and complex. For me, creating a work is a whole calendar of complexities.

YVANE CHAPUIS

Don’t these texts also give you the freedom to have your say, to use words in a way that doesn’t necessarily call for elaboration or justification?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

It’s a way of philosophising. These are texts I’d like to get across in other ways too—maybe in a reading—because all you have to do is listen to them. The hypnotically repetitive succession of scenes in *Opera’s Shadows* induces a special kind of listening. Your ears open up because the eyes are called on in a particular way. How do you go about listening differently today—differently

from when you’re in front of the TV for example? I need to see this piece—that’s something I’d like to experience so I could keep on exploring it. For instance, in my view the spatialisation of the sound still doesn’t reach out far enough in the direction of diversity. I feel that sound—and the screen—could still go further towards upsetting our perceptions. When I say that the spectator works, it’s not so much in terms of understanding what’s being said as of an urge to get inside other worlds and ideas.

What’s the place of the word intelligence in a work? Do I fully understand Merleau-Ponty? Maybe not, but he sets me thinking. Jankelevitch is my bible. Do I understand him? Maybe not, but I open the book, read, close the book, and I feel better. All those linkages... I quote no scholarly references at all. I resist, I even struggle against that. And maybe that’s where I’m not taken seriously—by some people. I’m going back to university to get a deeper understanding of Merleau-Ponty, but for me, for my work. Luciano Berio’s radio experiments? Carmelo Bene’s theatre? I know them but I need to rid myself of them. And from there on in it’s my business. Cultural references and history—I can’t trust myself with them. I think that art and the work of art are purely subjective, experiences that maybe can’t be shared. And yet I put on a show, with all the organisation that goes with it. That’s the ambiguity of the situation. That’s the contradiction in my work and in the professional world it’s part of.

YVANE CHAPUIS

So now for a referential question. The visual world of *Opera’s Shadows* contains allusions to aspects of 20th century abstract painting in the West. I’m thinking of Russian painting of the 1910s and 1920s—Suprematism and Constructivism—but also of the American Minimalist painting of the 1960s, and Rothko in particular. How does your work connect up with this historically?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

Before I started thinking of abstract painting, I wanted to look into the significance of light and of colour within light. In my collaboration with Aurélien de Fursac we began by choosing colour spectra—greens and browns, dull colours—that would allow the opening-up of certain spaces. Gradually, in this quest for colours that we projected onto a wall, we saw that they took on geo-

metrical shapes against a backdrop that was itself geometrical: the wall. Then we began playing with the shapes in terms of their contrasts, and out of this process of assemblage emerged a natural urge to play with geometrical shapes.

I was looking for colour volumes. The resources I had didn’t allow me to push towards the light revelations produced by James Turrell, for example. But the fact of projecting onto flat surfaces interested me and that was where plane geometry came in. Obviously I looked at lots of abstract pictures in all sorts of museums and exhibitions, and that was fascinating, but I also went through a stack of school geometry books and lost myself in scrutiny of different wallpapers. I’d also spent time in Japan, where the architecture is highly geometrical. If there’s a real reference to abstract painting inside *Opera’s Shadows*, it’s to Mark Rothko, whose work embodies the problematics of blur and sharp focus in the image. For me his pictures are the representation of a perceptual situation, a sort of visual concentration, the kind of thing that happens when you look hard at the horizon and you have the impression of perceiving shapes which then disappear immediately. It’s Rothko who brought me to the certainty that a structure, a projection system, is necessary so that the blur doesn’t dissipate, so that it’s held in by a very precise edge—the edge of the frame. Rothko launched me towards the picture, the picture as scenography. The wooden frame of *Opera’s Shadows* is perspective, and depth.

Listening again to the recording of the piece, I tell myself that breaks are needed in the sequencing of these light-pictures that might seem dedicated to the abstract painting of those periods—and which in fact are dedicated, to return to the thinking behind my work, to the mechanisms of interiority, the psyche’s projection mechanisms.

In my work on light, and thus on my light-pictures, I’ve searched for means of opening up the stage, for theatre scenographies. To put it critically, my stages haven’t yet achieved a sufficiently individual character, which is doubtless why the painting references are dominant. It’s probably at their point of movement—in their way of appearing and moving away—that there’s still something to be found. How can the screen become simply a screen by detaching itself from these references? We worked on this by having the screen turn white at the moment when a male singer’s voice says, “Why not you? Why

not you?" Granted, this is a relatively basic formal resolution that needs to be developed, but...

The visual abstraction is also linked to the piece's sound dimension. Nothing new about that! There's a whole history of the relationship between music and abstract painting. Of course, colour constitutes a sign, but because they contain no direct, concrete references the coloured geometrical spaces of *Opera's Shadows* leave full scope for words and their dramaturgy; and because of this search for a dramaturgy of words I've always thought that it wasn't appropriate for me to appear, since my movements would have influenced people's perception. This is also why I've worked with electronic and electroacoustic musicians: they offer sounds in which the body—whatever body—is not excessively present.

YVANE CHAPUIS

This absence of bodies—yours and the musicians', and objects too—from the stage, and this avoidance of any potential annexation of the sound and visual materials from a concrete reality (with the exception of your voice and certain sound effects): are they the outcome of a certain kind of sublimation?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I'm looking for detachment. For me the screen in *Opera's Shadows* is more a reference to horizons than to abstract pictures. In a way, what the piece is exploring is the mechanisms—the processes—of contemplation, and these issues take shape via a time frame. This explains in part the performance character of the work, as opposed to a shape set in an exhibition space with people passing through. *Opera's Shadows* is something to be experienced over time.

To come back to what I know about a piece before beginning it, there's a kind of instability, a kind of coming and going of floating perceptions. When I'm a spectator I particularly enjoy noting just when I begin to get interested, when I get involved, and why I pull out of what's being offered to me. If I get involved once, that means it's a success. I like a time frame to be distorted in relation to what it really is. Time is a datum I find especially interesting. How do you stage time? What tools do you use for staging it? Music is time, it seems.

YVANE CHAPUIS

How does the move from one piece to another happen? Do you finish one and move straight

on to the next? What gets under way in one piece that you'd like to follow up in another? It must surely be different in each case.

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

All appearances to the contrary, for me there's a clear link between *Stand* and *Opera's Shadows* at the visual level. In *Stand*² you have the impression that the photographs are always the same, yet when most of them move off they're not likely to come back. As I observed the movements of these photographs I was saying to myself that an abstract painting should make an entry and send the performance off in another direction. That was the first time in the course of putting a piece together that its successor began taking shape. And these are two pieces I'd really enjoy being able to rework. In both *Stand* and *Opera's Shadows* I'd like to go into the appearance and disappearance of the visual components function as disturbing elements in more depth. If I had to continue my critical evaluation of *Opera's Shadows*, I'd home in on the failure of the light to break down. I'm not talking about black, which for me is a colour, but of a kind of destructuring, of light-panic—a vertigo I don't want to create virtually, the way the cinema does with its special effects. The stage continues to be my central concern, and that's what I want to experiment with, but this requires resources and there's a problem with that just now.

YVANE CHAPUIS

A problem?

CLAUDIA TRIOZZI

I haven't yet had the chance to try myself on a major stage. I'll probably have to write a piece for a major stage, a project that explores the vertigo of the picture and in which the picture is not just a pictorial affair. What makes a picture a picture? What defines it?

Opera's Shadows, conceived by Claudia Triozzi, shown at the Laboratoires on October 26-27-28, 2005. Coproduction Festival Montpellier Danse 2005; Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers; Centre National de la Danse (company in residence). With the support of the Villa Kujoyama and of Anis Gras Le lieu de l'autre (Arcueil-France) / Period of residence at the Espace Pasolini, Valenciennes, and studio facilities at the Ménagerie de Verre / The Cespi association is supported by the Drac Île-De-France, Ministry of Culture and Communication.

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In *Stand*, the visual crux is a set of photographs not projected on a screen, but printed on paper and attached to a mechanism which enables them to move

towards and away from the spectator, and sideways. Regarding this piece, see the text by Jacinto Lageira in the *Journal des Laboratoires*, n° 4.