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# DANCE OF THE POS SIBLE

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# Rosalind Crisp: Dance of the possible

ISABELLE GINOT [TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN MUECKE]

Rosalind Crisp's work has been evolving since 2005 in the context of a project called *d a n s e*. *d a n s e* should not be understood as the name for a company or the piece they perform or indeed a style of choreography, but rather as a proper name, perhaps both the name of a particular community and its space which henceforth Rosalind Crisp calls 'practice' and which I would call 'field'. *d a n s e* does not have a precise date of birth, but its 'beginnings' are to be found around an idea of awareness that Crisp calls 'attention'.

*For a long time I improvised alone in the studio in order to produce materials for future pieces. d a n s e began when I was no longer interested in movement as such, but in the way I was producing it. Then I felt that this new process had its own autonomy. I came up with the first scores for d a n s e simply by naming what I was doing, and even now these are still foundations for the work.*

Above all, *d a n s e* is an attitude towards work based on a huge open repertoire of 'attention scores'.

Between 2003 and 2005 this continuous and solitary work was paradoxically supported by being shared with other performers, while the choreographer herself began to travel between Australia where she could rely on certain dancers who knew her work thoroughly thanks to extended practice, and France where she had begun to settle. If the work is to be communicated while it is in the process of being created, this means naming, identifying and explaining this process and thus contributing to its emergence.

*d a n s e* exists as a continuum—a choreographic soliloquy by Rosalind Crisp, underpinned through dialogue with different collaborators and partners and with pauses during informal presentations. This solitary work—which had some public exposure in the form of solos—is one of the continuous practices of *d a n s e* which feeds into all its other forms, linking into the process as it goes on. From 2005 there have been group or solo presentations with lighting, often staged in theatres which framed the process, giving it a more formal visibility. 'Sites' plus their titles (at first simply numbers) was the name given to these presentations, to indicate that they were not representations or choreographic pieces, but indeed 'stations' appearing on a provisional basis as part of a trajectory, which was most of all concentrating on research.

In a second phase, a new question was highlighted. Was *d a n s e* essentially a solitary practice, or could it become a field to be cultivated with others? This question proved to be two-sided. On the one hand, could this field entertain other performers without losing its identity, could people other than Rosalind Crisp share it, develop it and extend it? On the other, if *d a n s e* became a common space, what would be its capacity for conversation? In other words, did *d a n s e* have the capacity to produce dialogue and exchange among its collaborators, or would it rather remain a kind of silent language, capable of welcoming as many monologues as dancers in its space, but only in parallel form? *d a n s e* hesitated for a long time before giving a response: yes, once the performers had developed their individual soliloquies interior to the field, then the exchange and dialogue could become one of the objects of the broader project, one of its modes of existence. With the admission of performers other than Crisp herself, *d a n s e* became autonomous. People other than Crisp could develop and extend it, contributing in their turn to the process and detaching it from the body and imaginary of the choreographer.

Then, in 2008, Rosalind Crisp explored 'underground, a delicious infidelity in relation to the rules of *d a n s e*' that had been established up to this point through scores and the exclusion of non-dance elements. The issues that she explored in this regard were formalised in 2010 in

No one will tell us . . . The preceding sites interrogated her capacity to also produce exchanges as the very substance of *d a n s e*, among its other elements. Now it was a question of exploring the capacity of *d a n s e* to dialogue with the 'non-*d a n s e*' universe (for example, live music, performance).

But the problem of delimitation emerged. Where does *d a n s e* begin and end? What is part of it and what is foreign? If it is neither a solo nor a piece, technique nor 'approach', if, as happened a bit later on, its 'scores' or 'focuses' that circumscribe its territory at a given moment no longer define it, what then can its mode of existence be? What sort of permanence or continuity can define the borders of such a fluid territory?

## THE DISPERSIBLE BODY

A body, first of all. The body in *d a n s e* is dispersible. It has vigorous and subtle differentiations, which are essential for the maintenance of a large number of simultaneous actions and modes of attention. To become a contributor to *d a n s e* it is necessary to have gone through other dances, techniques and territories, but equally to have the desire to leave them behind. 'Undoing the body' is what Rosalind Crisp calls the corporeal preparation that stands for the initiation and daily entry into *d a n s e*. The title certainly suggests where it is coming from: 'undoing' the body and the modes of awareness accumulated from other practices and other dances. But 'undoing the body' also installs the 'foundations' for the work in *d a n s e*. It installs collective sensorial and perceptive qualities of attention, which buoy the field of play: work with weight, both global and fragmentary, as a guarantee for all the other qualities; a solid centering, which

Rosalind Crisp, Max Fosatti, *d a n s e* (4) 2008, photo Patrick Berger



is indispensable to the dispersal and fragmentation of attention and space. As different as they may be, all the performers working in *d a n s e* have in common a steadfast relation to the ground—the fundamental impermanence of the phrasing in *d a n s e* does not encourage any volatile movement. If, in the field, there are no movements, dynamics, speed or form that could be considered foreign, then all should be able to be interrupted, suspended, or thrown off track at any moment. Such impermanence makes the support of a solid reference crucial: this would be the ground with which all the performers have an infallible intimacy and which guarantees them direct support during all the changes of direction and force which they demand of their movements. So, apart from the qualities of movement and perception oriented around weight, practicing *d a n s e* means cultivating a certain detachment, a ferocious attention in a given moment, yet also a kind of buoyancy, a consciousness expanding far beyond the self.

Then, a grammar. *d a n s e* organises and governs the manner of making decisions. It orders a certain mode of comportment in time and space under the hold of gravity. The performer is free to produce their own dance on condition they respect the rules. Then we need to understand what 'rule' means in *d a n s e*: a principle that must be respected as long as it is 'productive', that is, while it allows the dancer to produce something unique; and which must cease being respected when it becomes normative or compulsory. Rules are therefore accompanied by their supple and inventive application. Some rules invent a corporeal geography: 'follow a part of the body until you notice another part, follow the latter until the next . . .'; 'increase, decrease or maintain the distance between two bones'. One of the features of the particular feel of *d a n s e* is the utopia of an entirely 'democratic' body. There is an equal presence of all parts

Rosalind Crisp, Hansueli Tischhauser, *No-one will tell us...* 2010, photo Patrick Berger



of the body: 'what part of the body hasn't initiated in the last two minutes?' In other instances the democratic body emerges through a concentration on weight and the dynamics of movement: 'constantly change the speed of the movement being executed, the level, effort, duration and amplitude'; 'add tone or effort to one surface'. Above all, *d a n s e* is interested in change, in impermanence in itself. It builds up the number of scores by accumulating them, multiplying them, stratifying them: 'start by doing a movement, then during it, notice the form or surface or part of the body, or imagination, and respond to that by various practiced and found means, i.e., start from not-noticing and actually let the movement/the body take the lead'.

Moving through the field of *d a n s e* one has the sense of both digging down into and crossing over—breaking the surface in order to move ahead through the strata left by the practice of all the scores, and without repetition, using the scores to explore the terrain which is not yet defined, or circumscribed, by the same scores. So *d a n s e* is buoyed by the scores, but not contained by them. Rather, *d a n s e* is held in the interstices, the uncertain zones and the empty spaces generated by putting the scores into practice, and also (especially) by abandoning them. Practicing *d a n s e* is, in the first instance, a matter of learning to juggle with more and more rules, which are also paradoxical and simultaneous, then learning to let them go. By doing this, *d a n s e* brings to light bodies and movements that are kaleidoscopic, composite, fragmentary and multiple—movements that can sometimes seem 'peopled' in the sense that a multiplicity of dance moves and styles inhabits the field. It can seem slow and rapid, or facing one way while heading off in another, constantly abandoning one impulse for the advantage of another, or even several others at the same time. *d a n s e* is attracted to the undoing of any cohesion in movement, and in particular, the historical cohesion of dance movements and choreographic writing.

## **AWARENESS AND PRESENCE**

The specific kind of attention in *d a n s e* does not relate to the body or to particular body parts (even if one kind of listening is indispensable to it), nor to the qualities of the movements being produced. It relates to the emergent process of the movement, its production logic. *d a n s e* has no a priori style, but sometimes seems disconcerted by intrusions. These intrusions are not movements or styles, but certain kinds of attention. For example, it can happen that a movement that appears in the field of *d a n s e* remembers its history, and the performer, who is not aware of this, allows him- or herself to be carried away by the logic of its original fabrication, following a familiar pathway and allowing this prior logic to infiltrate the field. So, what we are witnessing in these moments is not simply the appearance of foreign movements, but a shift in the particular awareness of *d a n s e* towards movement itself, indeed towards the image of movement. *d a n s e* does not manufacture or invent movements. *d a n s e* works the line of separation between the manufacturing of the movement and the movements themselves, and to this end develops multiple techniques of detachment in relation to the movement being carried out. Among these techniques, some relate strictly speaking to detachment: observing the process, slowing down decision making, waiting for something to appear, inhibiting impulses. In other cases there is the inverse procedure of multiplication, like the following, which is one of the choreographer's favourites: 'having several speeds at once, observing a new process and bringing one's attention to it while maintaining the process that's already occurring'.

So there is a present, and a specific presence, of *d a n s e*. This present is on the one hand, the product of the presence and distance of the performer in relation to the process underway, which makes it seem to be at the limit of engagement and detachment. On the other hand, this singular present is also made up from the temporal

stratification of different prior moments, and perhaps, moments to come. In the same way, the proliferation of scores is not resolved by a simple accumulation, which would make the performers juggle more and more simultaneous scores. Instead, the scores form a sort of flexible palimpsest. Some seem to disappear, but in reality they have just gone back to the practice bank, ceasing to be visible without ceasing to be active, whereas others are right up front. A score becomes important to the extent that it is capable of waking the presence or the attention of the performers. This attention can be caught, lost and even regained when it is put into dialogue with other scores it has not yet encountered. And as each performer progressively incorporates *d a n s e* and a certain body is being homogenised according to the scores in play, new scores turn up to undo it and reintroduce foreignness. The scores guarantee the elasticity of the relationship of each performer with the field. In other words, when several performers practice together, what is significant for *d a n s e* is not their engagement in one or another score, or their respect for the rules, but rather the moments where their attention, stretched between what is going on (what is happening to them) and what is not going on (the choices they are not making or cannot manage to make) makes something happen which neither they nor *d a n s e* had predicted or programmed. Such is, perhaps, the specific present of *d a n s e*.

### **BEING IN THE *d a n s e* AUDIENCE**

So what is it like being in the audience of a *d a n s e* site? The performers are operating according to rules they alone know and no visible object seems to organise their choices. The essence of the work in *d a n s e* is a choreography of choices of perception and attention; in other words, a choreography of the invisible. The audience member's position resembles that of an ethnographer. Clearly the performers exhibit social organisation—something ties them together and the action that takes place is organised, but what is the order? What seems to begin doesn't go anywhere or forms no particular shape. When a shape seems to emerge, it unravels or dissolves, leaving nothing behind but its ghost, like the shadow of a form which could have been seen, but which didn't appear. Being in the audience for *d a n s e* means responding to a nagging question: what is ordering their actions? What logic is common when there is nothing in the form, the construction of the space or the action sequence that is apparently shared? What is the nature of the 'communal' fact that unites them? Watching the dancers means witnessing a dance of awareness and of perception—perceiving not what decisions are made, but how they are made. The work of the audience is built as a consequence; watching *d a n s e*, henceforth, means taking a distance on the usual processes of one's own gaze and looking at how that gaze is formed. One is not figuring out the scores that drive the dancers, but discovering the foci of one's own gaze, and engaging oneself in composition with one's own responses. *d a n s e* imposes a double constraint: on the one hand following and 'listening' to the actions of the dancers, and on the other organising an autonomous and non-parallel scoring of one's own choices. Being an audience member for *d a n s e* then means observing an infinite number of invisible dances which might happen, and sometimes do happen, according to the performers' choices, allowing one's own gaze to prefer one dance over another and in the end taking part in an infinity of possible choices, for the performers and for the spectator. It means accepting being suspended in the vacant spaces between the dances exhibited and those one is making up; seen by the spectator, the field appears crowded with impulsive movements and with perceptions of these movements, with intentions, with lettings-go and with inhibitions. It means seeing as many actual dances as ghosts of other dances, which are equally possible but did not appear. So one can dream *d a n s e*, contemplate in it movements that exist as much as ones that haunt it, or try to make an appearance and are rejected but make themselves felt anyway. *d a n s e* as potential dances and the potential for the gaze.