

A common place

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► **To cite this version:**

Isabelle Ginot. A common place. Noémie Solomon (ed.). Danse : an Anthology, Les Presses du réel, p. 159-174, 2013. hal-02293877

HAL Id: hal-02293877

<https://hal-univ-paris8.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02293877>

Submitted on 25 Oct 2019

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“What is your opinion of contemporary creation today?” I was asked this question, which was in fact an invitation to write something, a few months ago by Michel Caserta—dance curator and institution director, among other things—following an earlier collaboration that had already given rise to an article.² Open, to say the least, this question did not appear straightforward during a period in which “contemporary creation” and its criticism (and thus “my opinion”) were undergoing far-reaching change. The “contemporary creation” I shall discuss in this article represents only a part, and perhaps a marginal one at that, of the current choreographic scene. However, and this is why it interested me here, it constitutes a very visible part, one that might even be considered to overshadow the rest of the creative sphere: that is the very poorly defined and badly named domain of “the new forms,” those that can be seen in a range of fashionable places—alternative or intermediary spaces, etc.

To my mind, this movement is above all characterized by a twofold critical production: first, it questions the choreographic legacy of, as well as the discourses “on,” dance, since it is clear that aesthetic and critical thoughts are closely linked, and that it is not possible to engage with one without becoming bound up with the other. It is well known that the end of the 1990s was affected by a crisis of every value that underlay the choreography of the previous decade. Today a new generation of dancers, choreographers, and performers offers an analysis of, and reaction to, the system as a whole, whose principal failing was its stifling uniformity. One of the qualities of this critical movement is that it tackles the system as a whole, showing how it operates in terms of aesthetics (which aesthetic norms are now dominant?), politics (what connections govern the relationships that exist between artists, artists and regulating bodies or curators,

¹ This article was first published in *Repères* 11, National Dance Biennial of the Val-de-Marne (March 2003).

² “Vingt ans... à venir?,” 20 ans, National Dance Biennial of the Val-de-Marne (on its 20th anniversary, 1999).

spectators and dancers, etc?), and economics (how the development of a market for the performing arts is indissociable from the development of an aesthetic). With the market saturated and the system hardly allowing any new names to enter, this period of theorization is being accompanied by political actions involving artists themselves taking up new spaces and modes of production.

A new community of dance has therefore emerged, coexisting with the previous generation and somewhat masking it. Whereas the '80s had brought "the new dance" to attention via institutional spaces (such as national theaters, festivals, etc.), the turn-of-the-century avantgarde began in alternative (soon to be termed "intermediary"?) spaces before more official programs and curators realized they had to change direction and slowly include these rebels.

An inherited "degree zero of dance"?

Since Yvonne Rainer has become the authority for many of these young artists, her own terms can be used to sum up the issues that predominantly concern this movement: no to spectacle, no to choreography, no to interpretation, no to drama...³ Thus, anti-shows are proliferating at the Ménagerie de Verre, in various industrial wastelands, in studios, etc. Myriam Gourfink, whether solo or in a group⁴, moves so slowly that her motion is hardly visible as she follows a mysterious score created by a digital device and derived from yoga postures. Jérôme Bel, in *Jérôme Bel* (1995), shows naked bodies, debased by elements of everyday life: creases and red blotches on the skin, urine, and so on. In *Distribution en cours* (2000), Emmanuelle Huynh fills the stage with an implausible set of objects collected by her dance colleague Christian Rizzo. Rizzo himself turns the stage and the dancers' bodies into showcases in *Et pourquoi pas: "bodymakers," "falbalas," "bazaar," etc., etc...?* (2001). A number of non-dancers appear on stage, revealing their non-virtuosic presence, but also displaying their intellectual, technical, or other capacities (for example, in 2001, Laurence Louppe, a critic and historian, appeared in Alain Buffard's *Dispositifs*; the psychoanalyst Sabine Prokhoris appeared as a fortune-teller in *Boissy 2* by Cécile Proust, and Isabelle Launay and Hubert Godard "performed" a reflection on the history of dance in *Faculté* by Boris Charmatz). In consequence, the traditional boundaries between spectators and performers are dissolved by the sensational use of manifestos, gatherings, texts, and performances. Dancers and non-dancers (especially critics) share the stage, but also the right to speak, creating new modes of production and presentation for the works. Of course, the traditional separations between disciplines (dance, theater, the visual arts) are once again abolished: Mark Tompkins (to take only one example) works alongside dancers, artists, actors, circus artists, and others.

These works owe a lot to what was perhaps wrongly considered as "the given knowledges" [*acquis*] (and which for this reason lost interest) of the 1970s. The heroes of the young French generation are the main avant-gardes figures in New York from the '60s and '70s. Laurence Louppe, exegete of the postmodern Americans, has become a leading reference for the French movement; in 1996, Yvonne Rainer was called back to

³ "No to spectacle. No to virtuosity. No to transformations and magic and make-believe. No to the glamor and transcendency of the star image. No to the heroic. No to the anti-heroic. No to trash imagery. No to involvement of performer or spectator. No to style. No to camp. No to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer. No to eccentricity. No to moving or being moved." Yvonne Rainer, "No Manifesto", *Tulane Drama Review* 10:2 (Winter 1965): 178.

⁴ Solos: *Waw* (1997), *Glossolalie* (1999), *Taire* (1999), *Too Generate* (2000); group pieces: *Überengelheit* (1999), *Écarlate* (2001).

dance by the Quatuor Knust when it recreated her *Continuous Project – Altered Daily*, as well as Steve Paxton's *Satisfyin' Lover*, thereby stimulating immense enthusiasm for the period and its masters. A stay with Ann Halprin, a legendary figure at the origin of the American movement, was of fundamental importance to Alain Buffard, formerly a performer in some of the "leading French companies."

A study of the history and aesthetics of the two periods and movements in order to understand the effects of this proximity still remains to be undertaken. However, some aspects are of particular interest to us here. First, the young artists' thirst for theory in both generations: dance broke the silence that has been claimed essential ("the dancers chose silence, they voiced their message with their bodies, not words...") and dancers took up the theorization of their work themselves, starting with a systematic critique of the aesthetics and economics of earlier choreographic productions. It is therefore clear that "creation" (i.e., artistic labor) means at once an intellectual and tangible [*sensible*] labor, and that it is not just gestural but also conceptual and discursive. Another element that these two generations have in common, and which is of special interest to this essay, is the trend toward the collective: we often hear of Judson Dance Theater, whose mythology has been a major influence on the works created by the new generation, as a collective. The '90s saw a resurgence of collectives, in particular groups with political agendas: the "reunions de Pel-leport," the Signataires du 20 août, Espace commun, Prodanse, among others, brought together artists, curators, administrators, and others. In addition, a phenomenon arose of what Christophe Wavelet coined "temporary coalitions."⁵ The distinction between the choreographer and performer has been dissolved in the simple fact that works are produced in a fashion in which the division between the two roles no longer makes any sense—authors, actors, and performers all work with and for each others. Thus Christian Rizzo can be both a "performer" and "costumer" for Emmanuelle Huynh, be part of a project by Rachid Ouramdane, and also choreograph a solo "for" the latter (*Skull*cult*, 2002), while continuing to create projects of his own that reunite the same colleagues, friends, and collaborators. *Morceau* (2000) "by Loïc Touzé" is described as being "conceived and realized by Jennifer Lacey, Latifa Laâbissi, Yves-Noël Genod, and Loïc Touzé." This piece brought together four performers (who are also authors of their own projects elsewhere) who bring to this work "by" Loïc Touzé not just their own contributions, but probably also common aesthetic questions. The examples of such collectives are endless: the formation of a tight network gives a number of dance groups the appearance of being a family. The phenomenon is closely associated with the dissolution of the hierarchical relationship between the choreographer and the performer (though it has probably been replaced by other hierarchies that might soon become apparent). And to this can be added the fact that the audience is filled with the same faces and names when they are not performing on the stage. Trisha Brown's remark concerning her early works is still very relevant to the new generation: "The people who watched my work were my peers, they made a very intelligent public."⁶

⁵ Christophe Wavelet, "Ici et maintenant. Coalitions temporaires," *Mouvement 2* (1998): 18-21.

⁶ Interview with Trisha Brown: "Entretien avec Trisha Brown: en ce temps-là l'utopie...", in *Danse et utopie*, Mobiles 1, Arts 8 (Paris: L'harmattan, 1999), 109. Ramsay Burt commented on the effect of this phenomenon in "Politique, communauté et la relation entre le public et les interprètes dans *Trio A* d'Yvonne Rainer et *Roof Piece* de Trisha Brown," Symposium "Pratiques, figures et mythes de la communauté en danse depuis le XXe siècle.", Centre national de la danse, Théâtre de la Cité internationale de Paris, 4-6 October 2002.

This “new dance community” is thus bound up in a common project in which one of the major issues is the notion of the work. In fact all of those characteristics of what constituted “good choreography” in the 1980s seem inapplicable to these recent productions: choreographic composition gives way to the “dispositif” (*Bord* by Emmanuelle Huynh, 2001), and gesture to improvisation constraints (*Algo Sera* by Nathalie Collantes, 2001). The nature of what delimits a “work” has changed, just like it changed with the aleatoric compositions of Merce Cunningham, the gravity-inspired adventures of Trisha Brown, and so on. And since then, of course, the nature of perception has changed too, as did the status of the spectator, the critic, the curator, and the producer. These last two are in a particularly difficult position: required to pay but also blamed for doing so (never enough and always in a suspicious fashion), they are considered to be domineeringly exclusionary if they do not provide funds for the show to enter the dance market, and manifestly mainstream or if they do. As for the critic, he sort of disappeared along with the dissolution of the boundary between him and the artist, who offers a discourse on the work while the work is being produced, unless his discourse is of course the work itself.

Under such conditions, the original question of “my opinion about contemporary creation” disintegrates due to lack of a vision, lack of criticism, and lack of creation, at least in the traditional meaning of this term. However loads of other questions remain open. First of all, that of the works themselves (which we should probably call “dispositifs” or “processes” to be sure not to confuse them with the earlier “works” that they wish to criticize). This new era is also striking for the redundancy that exists between the discourse and the works, and sometimes between the works themselves. It is tempting to lump all these works together, as I have just done, and describe the whole without attending to each piece’s details. Furthermore, though these pieces are based on the criticism or deconstruction of earlier models, they are also unquestionably dependent on them. Thus, the numerous performances that attempt to re-invent the “visible” (what is shown) fail to reconsider the conditions under which the piece is viewed, and present in the frontal perspective of traditional stages materials that are obviously conceived for a different use of space. Likewise, harsh criticism of the effects on aesthetics of the performance market (the system that underlies subsidies, production, distribution) does not thwart the presentation of pieces in places as symbolically and economically powerful as the Théâtre de la Ville. Is it that the negative effects of these presentation models are only prejudicial to the “old” dances from the 1980s, whereas those from the 2000s are immune, impervious to the effects of commodization? The impression is given that this is all cyclical, and that we are witnessing the endless return of the same old causes and effects. But can the trends of the dance scene be considered differently, and can they be analyzed in a productive, rather than in a disillusioned, way?

*The non-originality of the non-avant-gardes?*⁷

In a “very postmodern” spirit, this milieu (in the sense of both “professional milieu” and ecosystem, with its own laws, and forms of exchange and circulation, expenditure and compensation) is exceedingly devoted to the deconstruction of originality, the demiurgic creator, and authenticity, in order to replace

⁷ In tribute to the book by Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge [MA]: The MIT Press, 1986).

it with copy, ersatz, and sham, thus reinstating issues at stake thirty years ago. One of the paradoxes of the present phenomenon, I think, is to be found in the crystallization of positions in contradiction with these values. What are we to think of the questioning of the status of the choreographer and the performer (*Xavier Le Roy* "conceived by Jérôme Bel and directed by Xavier Le Roy") in a piece made available through the traditional distribution channels and presented in conventional conditions to an audience invited to attend in the usual manner, when it is difficult to understand how the category of the "audience" can resist while that of the choreographer and the performer is dissolved? How can these works be coproduced without their subversive impact being defused? How can they be presented in our theaters without their significance being reframed? Similarly, critics offer their discourse in an attempt to stay in step with this movement but in so doing double the overall quantity of discourse since these days artists produce their own. Yet how can the critics associate with the movement without producing "an author's discourse" that maintains the usual categories of critic, creator, and work of art? Conceived in this way, preservation of the traditional statuses of the artist, critic, and curator leads to fossilized or meaningless relations between the different functions: by producing pieces that are both "creative works" and "discourse on the works," and by producing "criticism within the community" (Jérôme Bel asks Alain Buffard and Xavier Le Roy to comment on his work;⁸ Christophe Wavelet analyzes Alain Buffard's work, and so on⁹), artists neutralize the traditional function of critics and appropriate for themselves the power that the latter normally hold. Perhaps it is precisely because artists want to secure this power that they sometimes offer views characteristic of traditional criticism (judgments, canonizations, excommunications, etc., using a vocabulary so specialized it smacks of the language of a cult). In so doing, they consolidate a form of perfectly harmonized discourse that *a priori* discredits any alternative thinking that might arise in relation to the works produced. Does this new radicalism lead to anything else than the advent of "a new generation" of artists (whom we must be careful not to call choreographers), the authors (despite their denials) of creative works produced on the back of endless subventions, co-productions, and communications? For their part, critics hardly have any other choice than to imitate the artists' discourse on their own work (a hagiographic stance) or to disparage their work (a negative standpoint that only confirms to the artists the need to do their own criticism). In spite of the apparent dissolution of any sort of boundary (between disciplines, functions, or discourse and creation, etc.), other less conspicuous confines subsist between the different but overlapping conceptualizations from the two time periods. In other words, the indictment of models at once aesthetic, political, and economic by a new generation of artists undoubtedly answers a vital need in the choreographic community. However, this "new era" overlaps with a rationale that is still derived from the time of the earlier models, even if the people involved seem to have moved on. Does the fact that it is "artists" who deliver most of the legitimating discourse on other artists and on themselves change anything in the content of the critical discourse as a ruling rather than legitimating one? Is the advent of these new models (a "re-advent" of old ones) opening other horizons beyond the recognition of a certain number of artists, to the detriment of those who will not be champions of radical attitudes? Is there anything else happening other than the creation of a new "milieu," of a new dandyism based, exactly like the previous

⁸ "Dialogue sur et pour Jérôme Bel," *Mouvement* 5 (June/September 1999): 29-31.

⁹ "Appropriations singulières," *Mouvement* 6 (October/December 1999): 61-63.

one, on an aesthetic consensus and signs that make it possible to distinguish between those who “belong” and those that don’t, as much among the artists as among the professionals, not to mention the audience?

These ambiguous conceptual stances as a whole, as well as the growing feeling of being personally invaded by the vague, abstract, “elusive” language used to describe these new forms—language the works themselves and their surrounding communication are composed of—lead me to attempt in this essay in order to catch hold not of “what does not work in the system,” but rather “what does not work in the way we think and devise the system.” Besides, how does one understand the phenomenon of “elusive language”? In the middle of the era of copying, duplication, and the destruction of anything to do with the notion of origin, the critic that I am would very much like to not be cornered (either by herself or by archetypes of thought) into making judgments, however justified they might be, on the validity or “originality” of works, nor into taking responsibility for her own discourse, invaded as I feel it is by the discourse of “all the others.” And the educator that I am would like to be able to lay down her weapons in her fight against all clichés, stereotypes, and received ideas, a fight that is the base of my experience teaching on dance.

Dance as doxa and doxa as envelope

That is why today I am trying to shift my attention on “contemporary creation,” moving away from a focus on its subjects (choreographers, performers, curators, etc.) or its figures (the works) to analyze it as “doxa.” To Anne Cauquelin,¹⁰ doxa is an autonomous form of learning, not a false or inferior one, but a specific register of knowledge: a “common place”—a place that is shared—and a common thought. Or perhaps, says Cauquelin, an envelope: what surrounds us, a fluid and fleeting discourse of knowledge that permeates, and above all engenders, our overall acts, perceptions, and discourses. In addition, doxa is what is passed by word of mouth, what is not only constant and continuous, but also partial, heterogeneous, contradictory, and, most importantly, always in movement. Thus the doxa is an envelope. Cauquelin also notes that what recent debate has called “the end of art” is actually more akin to the crumbling of the difference between container and content—or between a work of art and its exhibition, between creation and communication, and so on. What is contemporary art? A doxa, she suggests, and gives numerous examples: a shopping list, catalogues, commentaries on a work of art in place of the artwork itself, an exhibition as a work of art, etc. Therefore, the true avantgarde standpoint is to acknowledge that the discourse on an artwork is part and parcel with the work itself, that the envelope and its content have long mutually penetrated one another, and that in reality only the envelope exists, not as an empty container but rather as connective tissue. Contemporary art has done away with the separate elements of artist and artwork by turning the art world into a “*réseuil*”¹¹: “[confining] works, artists, and professionals as well as any viewers/buyers in this increasingly tight net, so much so that this *réseuil* ends up being identified as art itself. Thus art is nothing other than this network, which would be unable to exist if it did not perform the functions of a network, that is to say, if it did not form, deform, and transform itself at every moment.”¹²

¹⁰ Anne Cauquelin, *L'art du lieu commun. Du bon usage de la doxa* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

¹¹ An ancient word for net or netting, including handcrafted nets to decorate tables, bed linens, etc. Source: *Dictionnaire Universel*, compiled by Antoine Furetière, 1690.

¹² Anne Cauquelin, *L'art du lieu commun*, 190.

From the viewpoint of contemporary dance, it would be possible to draw a history of the movements taking place within doxa (Anne Cauquelin devotes her book to describing the “physical nature,” “logic” and “aesthetic quality” of doxa) and to observe them as such, rather than lamenting (as it has long been a “common place” to do) the damaging effects perpetrated by “fashion” on dance. It would be possible to describe how “the contemporary dance of the 1980s” developed on the basis of a common discourse, a common language (an envelope) in which artists, critics, curators, and spectators either shared, or were excluded from, a particular form of thought. And rather like a meteorologist, Anne Cauquelin goes on, it would be possible to monitor the direction of the currents and alterations of form that led to new semantic or aesthetic constellations (or nebulas) during the 1990s. It would also be possible to draw up a list, though inevitably incomplete, of the “key notions” and, above all, the vocabulary used in the transmission of this doxa (“radicalism” [*radicalité*], for instance, seems to have played a major role in the transition of the choreographic doxa’s figures from the ‘80s to the ‘90s). But that is not the aim of this essay. Our interest is more in the effects perpetrated by this “new figuration”: contemporary dance as a common place.

We cannot be certain that the observations inspired by the contemporary art scene can simply be transferred to the contemporary dance scene. In particular, as we have seen above, the crumbling of the figure of the artist and of the status of the work in such a dance scene is far from actual. Moreover, the choreographic milieu that this essay attempts to draw “a different fiction” of may not be the totally uniform and perfectly fluid network that the term “*réseuil*” seems to describe, as it also includes stones, countercurrents, and pockets that create resistance. Beyond these questions of texture, which might appear abstract to the reader, in what way does this vision of the choreographic scene change the present order? Is seeing the ensemble of our activities as spectators, artists, critics, political decision-makers, and curators as just so many aspects of the same thing, or as the multiple faces of a Möbius strip (the envelope) not the same as repeating (another trick of doxa) what contemporary artists and critics keep asserting: that there is no divide or essential difference between the artists and non-artists, between the works and the world itself?

What I am interested in doing here is observing in what way identifying the features of this strange body that we all belong to—the doxa—would allow different ways of seeing or communicating to be initiated; to observe not the individuals involved in the action (artists and critics observing and commenting on one another; the subjective choices of curators affecting the career path or the potential of a particular artist, etc.), but rather the actions themselves and their effects. If we now consider artistic gestures, discourses, actions, and texts as different aspects of the same fabric of knowledge—the common places—then contrasting a certain register of critical thought against a certain aesthetic choice by a certain artist no longer makes much sense. This standpoint radically blurs the status of the subject, whether artist, curator, or spectator. Therefore, the issue for critics would no longer be to “produce discourse” on a particular work or artist, but to consider, for instance, what kind of force underlies and organizes the work in question; or to understand what intention or inclination gives rise to both the creation of a piece and the programming or coproduction of a theater. And finally to recognize what movements are at work within this milieu, such as are revealed by certain moments of creation and reception...

¹³ This issue is borrowed directly from Chinese thought as François Jullien theorizes it in *La Propension des choses* (Paris: Seuil, 1992).

Making things possible

Thinking of choreography as a whole in terms of the “movement of things” would make it possible to untangle the causal relations that organize and order our vision of art, and to pose the question of ethics again (why and for whom does art exist?), which is crucial in a field where aesthetics and politics are tightly bound up by public services. Belief that the curation, the production, the financing schemes, the architecture of the performance spaces, etc., exist to promote or impede the birth of creative works leads “contemporary creation” to become the Holy Grail that all actions of the professional network are trained for. But the proposal could be reversed: What does a particular work make possible? From what potential has it emerged? And what potential does it offer in return?¹³ This question would not only allow the principles of causality to be reattributed, and their links with whichever revered creator is under consideration (artist, author, etc.), but also the questions of responsibility, and therefore of ethics.

In the present period, numerous discourses (particularly those of artists) aim to get choreographic work considered on a critical register: considered with respect to earlier works or periods, or a number of aesthetic conventions, or to political and economic standpoints. These discourses are used to reflect on other works, other discourses, other actions, but in so doing, they either turn attention away from the works themselves or focus strongly on a particular aspect. The change of viewpoint offered here has the aim of activating other registers, other choreographic “potentials”—not to replace the critical register, but to present an alternative. If the thought and practice of dance are a form of doxa, it is therefore the study of its movements, rather than the study of its objects, that might be of interest. Especially what I shall call flows: gestural, economic, and semiotic flows (regarding the latter, the phenomenon of abstract, elusive language would be effectively described, I think, starting from “the epidemiology of doxa,” as is also described by Cauquelin: how words and concepts flow from person to person, and from article to conversation, and become simultaneously commonplaces and de rigueur in dance theory). For example, the question of speed seems to be particularly topical (Jérôme Bel talks about his “immobile years”¹⁴) and a large number of pieces can be considered from the perspective of the slowing down that they entail. A slowing of gesture, but maybe also the slowing, or even interruption, of the semiotic, economic, and other activities of which these “works of art” are traditionally the driving force (what is implied here are the activities initiated by any production project, and by the piece itself, such as its presentation, audience gathering, spectacle economy, distribution, comments on the piece, among others).

An example is given by the solo developed by Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero: *Une mystérieuse Chose, a dit e.e. cummings* (1996). In many respects, it belongs to the traditional economy of spectacle. This piece tours and is presented regularly, and therefore follows standard economic activity. In retrospect, one can also envisage this solo as a moment of the shift and re-composition of the aesthetic and political issues that were to become central to the majority of pieces in the years that followed (the rejection of dance, the questioning of the norms relating to the dancer’s body...). It has therefore become a “reference” piece. However, even though it was explicitly loaded down with layers of meaning (in terms of the costume, make-

¹⁴ “Les délices de Jérôme Bel,” *Mouvement* 5 (June/September 1999): 27.

up, text, references indicated in the theater program, etc.), this piece seems to produce a slowing-down effect, even one of stasis, in what I will call the semiotic flows—the generation of discourse and thought about itself—since it simply resists interpretation. As one watches the solo, all thought comes to a halt, only to start again and be enveloped in a discursive flow. As Vera Mantero, paralyzed by the goat hooves she wears that threaten her balance, reels off a long list of impossibilities (“a sorrow, a dreadful impossibility, a sadness, a lack of conviction, a fall, an absence”...), any potential interpretation is blocked as soon as it starts. Thus this form of immobility is not just an absence of movement, but an interruption of movement: a gesture begun but quickly blocked, a hint of meaning given but then dismissed. In consequence, I see this solo as stasis, an interruption in the economy of meaning: *Une mystérieuse Chose...* does not get involved in the networks of commentary, interpretation, or the commodization of meaning. Of course, it is possible to see in it (some did) a criticism of the economy of spectacle and choreography, or perhaps the symptom of a crisis in the artist herself, who seems to be affected by the “impossibility” of dancing. But can we consider this non-dance from the viewpoint of what it makes possible, for example, a diversion (like a stone diverting a stream of water) in the economy of meaning? A moment of standstill and resistance (in the physical sense) to movement, which is no longer seen as an “ideal” of liberty, but rather as a “compulsory direction of circulation.” Stasis here is a moment of immobility in reaction to the economy of flows.¹⁵ Any attempt to reconstruct a coherent interpretation of this solo seems like an effort to reduce its power,¹⁶ to counteract its potential or, to use François Jullien’s term, its “inclination,” meaning the effect of tension generated by the work.¹⁷

It might therefore seem paradoxical to choose an example that deals with immobility and stasis to illustrate this notion of the “movement of things.” Dancers know well the first reason for this choice: immobility is a state of movement (a “small dance” according to Steve Paxton, or a tension more or less strong yet balanced between two directions of movement). The second and more directly illustrative reason is the increase in instances of immobility or extreme slowness in recent pieces (Jérôme Bel, Myriam Gourfink, among others). Finally, it also seems to me that this slowing down of physical gesture, or “still acts,” relates to a “movement of things” that the established order would want to have remain “free”: free trade, flow management, globalization, etc., incessantly stimulate the fantasy of rapid, free, and unimpeded movement—see, for instance, ATAC’s economic analyses. Stasis may therefore be seen as an imperceptible action, but one that disturbs the flow and circulation.

And since this long reverie is a response to an invitation from the Val-de-Marne Biennial, might it be possible to imagine “the place”¹⁸ (and all the structures by which it is affected, such as financial schemes, political proposals, architectural spaces, functions, and public attendance) as a response to this question? To which “inclination” is this place a propensity, and of which dynamics is it a result? What would the

¹⁵ André Lepecki inspired this perception of Vera Mantero’s piece as stasis from his commentaries on another of her solo works, *Dança do existir*. He borrowed the notion of “still act” from anthropologist Nadia Seremetakis: “for Seremetakis, ‘still acts’ represent moments of pause and standstill in which the subject—by physically creating a break with temporality—questions what she calls ‘historical dust.’” In “Le Miroir éclaté,” *Protée, Danse et Altérité* 29:2 (Fall 2001): 68.

¹⁶ This viewpoint is developed in “Dis-identifying: Dancing bodies and analysing eyes at work,” *Discourses in Dance* 2:1 (Spring 2003): 23-34.

¹⁷ François Jullien, *La Propension des choses*.

¹⁸ Over the next few years, the Biennial will be constructing a new place for dance out of a disused factory. See the article “2003” by Philippe Verrièle in *Repères* 11 (March 2003).

effect be, in terms of cultural policy, if it were conceived of as a place “dedicated to dance” that was not based on its potential output (the hosting, production, and presentation of pieces to the public; giving classes, etc.), but envisioned in terms of work and process? Would it be possible to conceive of such a place taking speed as its starting point? Since the idea of a place as a “container” to accommodate “any kind of creation” (the revival of the famous multipurpose spaces of the 1970s) is an illusion, might it be possible to, rather than continuing to ignore the prospect, conceive a “place for dance” as a process that, like the works themselves, defines or indicates certain inclinations or dynamics? And, if we can take that as a given, perhaps we could cease to think of the place as a location (the theater being a sort of sealed container at the door of which “dance” either becomes available or ceases to become available) and consider it rather as moments, a space that could be “activated” when required and is no longer permanent... A space that could be thought of as work and movement rather than as a building.

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To quote from this article : Isabelle Ginot, « A common place », in Noémie Solomon, *Dance: an anthology*, Les Presses du réel, New York Série, 2013, p. 159-174. Reprinted in 2019.

Taken from a digital version published on the website Paris 8 Danse in 2019 : www.danse.univ-paris8.fr