

## Raphaëlle Doyon & Claire Heggen

# Making Visible

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### Raphaëlle Doyon

I have realised that the people who have touched me most, during my apprenticeship and subsequently as an actress and spectator, have been women. To name only a few: Nacera Belaza, Roberta Carreri, Claudia Contin, Léa Dant, Isabelle Esposito, Claire Heggen... What they have in common is that they have developed their own personal 'techniques' even though some of them would hate the use of that word. They are not interpreters; they all create their own material and each one of them has her own unique way of working.

However, in theatre history, unless women are 'stars' they are perceived most usually as an anonymous group. Men, on the other hand, are a company of individuals whose names are celebrated and recognised.<sup>1</sup>

That's one of the reasons why I have given myself the challenge in my academic work of quoting the names of some of these theatre women and giving a detailed description of their work, and of inviting them to do the same thing. I do this militantly because I believe that their work should be better known; it is an ethnography of theatre practice.

I think that these testimonials are necessary for future generations: they are a record of these women's living practice. But initially I have chosen to talk about one woman in particular: Claire Heggen.

Claire Heggen founded the Théâtre du Mouvement with Yves Marc thirty years ago. I first followed their training courses and later participated in a research project on the physical expression of emotions and states of thought led by Yves Marc. I describe here three of Claire Heggen's qualities that have impressed me since my early days of apprenticeship with her.

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1. See Fabio Lorenzi-Cioldi, *Individus dominants et groupes dominés: images masculines et féminines*, PU Grenoble, 1988.

### FIRST QUALITY: POLYCHROMY

Claire Heggen is able to move from complete physical relaxation to the height of physical tension, through all the intermediate states of tension: a polychromy of physical density.

One of her warm-up exercises begins with you lying on your back and giving as much body weight as possible to the floor. On the out-breath, you curl up quite fast into a foetal position on one side and then, on the in-breath, you return to lie on your back on the floor, alternating sides each time. The exercise develops and speeds up and in a later phase, whilst always passing through the foetal position, you use a spiral movement to seek the vertical and find yourself standing. Then, by turning again, you return lightly to the position lying on the floor. You repeat this many times, until you achieve a fluidity and find a centre in the lower belly. I often use this before working in the room. It awakes my attention and makes me ready and alert, since it takes the body through different toning and stimulating qualities.

This exercise doesn't work with an articulated or segmented body: it is fluid and round. Jacques Lecoq would say that it is "*sympathique*". He said that something that is round and flowing, without angles, does not comprise drama; that flowing movements make a character seem pleasant, without breaches.

This exercise works with the whole body, it doesn't work with physical contradiction. The whole body is in the same momentum. In spite of its apparent simplicity, the exercise involves a technique that does not have recourse to habitual, everyday body movement: transforming weight into energy with the least muscular effort. It is a conscious release closer perhaps to contemporary dance, which Claire Heggen has also practised and taught. This extra-daily technique doesn't require a great



Raphaëlle Doyon. Photo: Gaëtan Kohler

expenditure of energy; it requires knowing how to manage energy. It is a 'negative' technique that invites us to withdraw muscular tensions rather than add them.

In the same session we also worked with very strong physical resistances in walking or in stillness, a "drama of the muscle" to use Etienne Decroux's expression.

In improvisation, the whole palette of physical tensions could be employed. We could move from a normal daily walk to an extreme game of physical and respiratory contradictions.

In contrast, a relaxed energy makes a tension visible. I often think of this when I see actors who, through years of training, have barricaded themselves progressively into bodies of stone - present certainly - but with a strength entirely acquired by the muscles.

What struck me from that first

meeting with Claire, was her pragmatic sensibility that welcomes approaches as different as contemporary dance or physical mime according to their relevance to the theatrical action. She doesn't refer to them as schools, methods or aesthetics that are mutually exclusive, but as different possibilities for stage presence. She has worked with Etienne Decroux, one of the greatest masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that has become for her a centre from which she can also turn away. With these different tools, she has built a personalised laboratory of the theatricality of movement.

Claire is not only a teacher. She does not profess. She initiates us into the knowledge of our own bodies and an expanded wisdom. Minutely, like a goldsmith, she delivers the results of thirty years of research with Yves Marc within her company.

### **SECOND QUALITY: LOOKING**

Ever since the first workshop, we worked on what Claire and Yves call "the placing of masks on the body". They made a production based on this premise in 1978: *Tant que la tête est sur le cou* (While the head is on the neck). In Claire's article that follows, she gives an example from this production to illustrate the physical play in the body between the whole and the part. The principle of this work is to let 'little bodies' appear by placing a mask on a part of our 'large body'. If I put a mask on my elbow, the masked elbow becomes the head of my "character" (my puppet), while my forearm, hand and fingers form its body. We had to choose a part of the body on which to place a mask and give it shape and life. I put my mask on my right hip. My thigh formed the body of my character, my lower leg its legs, and my foot, its feet. At the time I was taking a course in African dance with the choreographer and dancer, Elsa Wolliaston.

We spent some time with her "oiling" our pelvic and hip joints to the sound of rhythmic percussion. Articulating the gaze of the mask placed on my hip didn't seem difficult to me and finally I found some satisfaction and easiness in doing the exercise. I worked enthusiastically and several participants in the workshop interrupted their activities to look at my little character. Claire watched it for a few minutes and then said (perhaps not exactly in these words): "Your mask doesn't exist because you know how to move your hips. You must project the mask's intention further. The driving force of the movement is in the mask and must not remain on the surface of your own body. And then put the centre of gravity in his belly. Don't move in relation to your own." How to do this? What does putting a centre of gravity in a knee mean physically? However we know the effect of the imagination on the form of the body: actors who think they are heavier weigh more. I projected the energy outside myself and created a centre of gravity for my mask and moments later I saw it and sensed it come to life.

### **THIRD QUALITY: WELL CONCEIVED**

When you watch Claire in movement, when she is not teaching, you are not aware of the physical principles that she employs. As she walks, you observe the voluptuous way she places her foot on the ground, without imagining the years of previous work implied in that walk: the ease and flexibility of her ankle, how her foot opens up on the floor, the nostalgia of her contact with the ground, the push back of the same foot, its fall, the alignment of the bone cages of her body (head, chest, pelvis). You see the artist and forget what she knows.

But Claire is also a pedagogue. She formulates the principles of her work with extreme clarity. Claire Heggen delivers the

detailed clues of "know-how". She doesn't conceal the route to be taken. She explains, deconstructs, formulates. In addition to a profound knowledge of morphology and anatomy, she had an apprenticeship in classical dance that has initiated her in a vocabulary where words have a physical translation. In the same way, Claire Heggen has developed a codified physical grammar, all the elements of which can be named and identified. When I interview Claire, I learn "how to articulate how it is done".

Work with performers like Claire Heggen has encouraged me to write about their practice. While I do it, I ask myself: what happened to a woman who did the same work a few centuries ago? How can we access her testimonies, her making of stories from her own body? I am looking into the methodological problems of a history of women and of theatre, a real historiographical challenge.

## Claire Heggen

2005: my present, the creation of my solo *Le chemin se fait en marchant* (The path is made by walking); my past, my memory, my artistic path of thirty years, of creating, of practice traversed by actors and directors; of authorship, research and teaching. So let's talk about it, for the future and in order to hand it on.

First, a statement: over the years I have remarked some constant elements that inspire my research in a subterranean way, and orient my aesthetic choices and my ways of working. These are contained in several key words, for example:

Materiology: my primary resource is the body - mine, the actors, the objects.

Presence: in between appearance and disappearance, to make various beings exist.

Distance: my compass that intimately places me outside myself and what is familiar.

The unforeseeable: in between



Claire Heggen. Photo: Juliette Trouillard

'measured and mad', welcoming the unexpected, the unthinkable, hoping for the unforeseeable in the project itself, creating the conditions for its appearance.

States of the body: to be listening, identifying, stimulating, rediscovering the ephemeral feeling of the body.

Theatricality of movement: all that is theatrical before starting to make theatre.

Writing: writing theatre while making it, with no pre-existing scenario.

And now, to choose a theme that is emblematic, representative, and speaks of all my work processes: the actor, being somewhere between the subject and object of art.

I write developing some extracts from already published articles and from an interview with Raphaëlle Doyon, whom I thank for her curiosity and her collaboration.

## THE OBJECT

*You ought to consume yourself for the object and not consume it.*

We have always used objects in our productions except during our Decroux period, when we were in leotards. In that case our bodies were the objects. We were at the same time the object and the subject of the art. But apart from that, in our productions, we have always introduced elements or materials, not necessarily manufactured objects.

At a certain point I was invited by the École National Supérieure des Arts de la Marionnette of Charlesville-Mézières, in affiliation with the Institut International de la Marionnette, to teach students at the school. At first, I worked on the physical training of the puppeteers but I could not prevent myself from observing how they behaved with the objects (or puppets) and

carried them. The way in which they manipulated them, from on top, underneath, behind, sideways, with wires, gloves, strings, required an adjustment in relation to the organicity of the body and of the object. It was a time when the apprentice puppeteers wanted to manipulate in full view. For me this posed a big question: a puppet alone and visible works well but as soon as I saw the everyday body of the puppeteer manipulating his or her puppet (which was not everyday), I noticed the puppeteer more than the puppet.

How should the manipulator be seen while manipulating? What status should the actor/manipulator assume? Is the manipulator a parallel presence, an absent presence; does s/he share a dialogue with the puppet? Can the manipulator be referred to as a character in the same way as the puppet? Is the manipulator simply a physical geography in which the puppet moves about? How to follow the direction of the object? How to give the object priority over the body in this continuous struggle between its presence and the human presence, without diminishing the object to a pretext for movement or making it an accessory (an extension of the subject, in waiting to be the subject)?

I experimented myself, groping about, seeing both sides, that of the puppet, that of the puppeteer, and developed little by little a strange sort of tool box made up of technical principles, terminologies, aphorisms, theoretical concepts, questions and intuitions.

I re-examined some previous experiences: for example, Etienne Decroux's technique and vocabulary (there is an important similarity between the functioning of the articulated puppet and the physical body of the corporeal mime artist); Gerda Alexander's eutony, significant for ideas of contact, touch, projection across and beyond

the object.

I developed a grammar of the body-object's relationship with the guiding idea of a body that commits itself to the object, whether in a discreet intimacy or to the extremity of a fall. This could be almost invisible and happen with a tiny object manipulated on a table, or be expanded to the commitment of a physical actor. These are the basic principles that flow under different aesthetics.

## TECHNICAL PRINCIPLES

*Know what you are doing  
in order to be able to do what you want.*

M. Feldenkrais

Following are some of the technical principles that I use: in order to circulate the information in a triangular manner (object, manipulator, spectator) it is necessary to articulate it; it is difficult to hear anything if everyone talks at the same time; the actions in the body, time and space should be articulated with simple principles such as, for example, the notions of:

- fixing  
(fixed point/mobile point; fixed body/ mobile object; fixed object/mobile body)
- contradiction
- progression/degression
- articulation, "one at a time"
- the whole/the part.

This articulation permits reciprocal support. The actor/manipulator, a real "*Maître du regard*", guides the spectators' attention to what they should see, to what must be shown of the object, of the manipulator, or of the relationship between the two.

Movement theatre, mime and puppetry all use the notion of the fixed point. For me this notion encompasses very different realities and rather than speaking

of the fixed point, I prefer to speak of the process of fixing in space or time the puppet or object, the manipulator's body - and not necessarily his whole body, a part of the body, the axis, supports, the different bases in the body. What is it that one fixes, at what moment and what is it that one wants to highlight? It is a notion that allows one to extend the attention onto oneself or one's exterior in a privileged way, to highlight an object a posture, an attitude, an image, a relationship, a thought in movement, a fading idea, by putting oneself at its service.

## FIXED POINTS

In order to focus the spectator's attention on the puppeteer, the object or the relationship between the two, I work, schematically, as follows:

If I stay still, using more or less intensity, and I move the puppet with my isolated hand and arm, then the spectator's attention will be directed onto the puppet. The spectator looks where there is movement. This is even more true if I hide myself in a simple presence-absence and fix my eyes on the puppet. The spectator looks at what is looked at.

If I reverse the relation and I immobilise the puppet in a precise place in the space and I move in relation to the fixed puppet, once more the spectator's attention follows the movement, that is to say, my body that moves in response to the fixed point that is the puppet.

If I move aside, approach, turn away from the still puppet to the extreme point where its immobility is endangered, the confirmation of its stillness, not only in not moving but in "not wanting to move" confers on it the intention to resist my movement, an independent will.

It is not the puppet's movement that makes it exist but its fixed point in

space. I create simultaneously an action and counteraction in my body. In fact, I lend materiality to the puppet by a movement at the same time agonistic and antagonistic, and give it substance, different qualities thanks to variations in muscular tone. The spectator looks where there is immobility, where there is resistance.

If I move in one direction and the puppet in another, I create a muscular drama, a drama of crossed tensions, what Etienne Decroux called the "drama of muscle". It is no longer about immobility but about contradiction. The spectator attributes life to the puppet-object who becomes subject just like the actor. This time, the spectator looks where there is a contradiction, where the relationship of the two subjects is fixed in space.

Playing with these different ways of immobilisation gives the spectator the impression that the puppet has intentions, physical states, thoughts, emotions, etc. and produces effectively the same kind of states in the actor. The actors, conscious of the effect that they produce in manipulating these tools, can modulate and prioritise as they please the use of the object, of themselves, or of both at the same time in a triangular relationship with the spectator.

### PROGRESSION/DEGRESSION

If the puppet is in a progressive movement in relation to the puppeteer's body, attention will go towards the puppet and it is the puppet that the spectator will watch. A progressive movement is one in which the extremity (the puppet) leads the base (the puppeteer's body) by successive degrees. A degressive movement is the opposite. If the puppet is in a degressive movement in relation to the puppeteer's body, attention will go to the puppeteer. The spectator looks not only where there is movement but where the

movement originates, the driving force of the movement.

### THE WHOLE AND THE PART

Etienne Decroux's technique involves working on physical disassociations that strongly isolate parts of the body. As with a camera, you can zoom in on a point of the body and then widen the field of the image. Using this technique of localisation, you direct the spectator's eye to move from one part of the body to another or from one part to the totality the body. If it happens that dance works only on one part of the body, it will always be envisaged within the harmony of whole.

To illustrate this, I will use an example from the dramatic sequence of Mother and Child in *Tant que la tête est sur le cou* (While the head is on the neck) that Yves Marc and I created in 1978.

I have a neutral feminine mask on my face and a neutral masculine mask on my knee. At the beginning the spectator sees one entity, a woman sitting sewing, a whole body, its lower leg lying with a mask on the knee. While she sews - the activity of sewing doesn't stop during the whole sequence - the baby, the little masked body, wakes up. The spectator identifies very quickly that it is supposed to be a child. There is a disassociation of actions and activity between the mother, made up of a leg, the complete torso, the arms and the head and, on the other side, this other lower leg that wears the mask and finds its independence. The game will be created between the two specific entities, re-united in the whole body: the mother and the child. The child annoys his mother giving her a first kick. She is surprised but goes on with her sewing. The child, more and more restless, gives her a second kick. He receives a smack in return. She returns to her sewing. He begins to cry and cuddles

up to his mother. She pretends not to notice him. He continues to cry and she takes him in her arms, comforting him until he goes to sleep. It is a simple story. It makes me think of a phrase of Decroux's: "What is important is not to do extraordinary things in an ordinary way, but rather ordinary things in an extraordinary way". It is not so much the story which is interesting but the way in which it is visualised.

This sought after schizophrenia provokes a double home for the actor and a double reading for the spectator. I believe that the spectators' pleasure resides both in the simple story (they don't have to ask themselves what it is all about) and in the game of coming and going between the big and little body, between the normal whole body and the distinct fictional bodies. They can accept the illusion for a while and return to reality, navigate between childhood memories and the present conjugated by the time of the scene, oscillate as they like between metonymy and metaphor.

### THE OBJECT: PUT UP WITH IT

What is it that will create the uncanny distance and strangeness? How can one treat the body in a non-usual way whilst giving the impression of being normal? By, for example, reversing the connections or creating paradoxes. The first time that I noted this was while directing Yves in his solo with a pipe. The usual way of smoking a pipe is to bring the pipe up to the mouth and then move it away. I said to him: "Do the opposite, the pipe stays still and you move away from it and towards it again. Your whole body must be put at risk for the sake of this little pipe." It is strange, one sees him smoking but it is not in the usual way. It is unknown and known at the same time. The spectators do not necessarily know why. They are not necessarily aware of it but

surreptitiously the distance that this produces challenges them.

### WRITING THEATRE WHILE MAKING IT

For one of the productions that I directed at Théâtre du Mouvement, *Encore une heure si courte* (Still another brief hour), we worked from the beginning on the musicality of movement and its meeting with Georges Aperghis' scores and musical texts. That met with my desire to work on the physicality of the masculine with a trio of men. It so happened that a judo tournament had taken place in the room where we were working. Three boxes of different sizes that had made up the podium had been left behind. We played with them and the images that appeared inspired us to include these boxes in our explorations. Very quickly I remarked that the actors, or rather their bodies, were shaped by the boxes.

To get into the boxes, they were obliged to squash their bodies into a very narrow rectangular space. In some way they were shaped by the interior of the box. When they carried the very heavy wooden boxes, they were fashioned by the exterior of the boxes. Their bodies adjusted to the volume, weight and centre of gravity of the boxes. I seized this 'proposition', and imposed on the actors cubist gestures which were articulated and deconstructed in the body and space.

In fact, these propositions led the actors to a continuous coming and going between various degrees of realistic and formalised ways of playing, also through free association, a kind of automatic writing with the body. Moreover, there was a metaphorical interpretation of the boxes which became by turn a boat, refuge, island, mother's belly, gift box, staircase, labyrinth, etc. In parallel with this exploration, a vocabulary was elaborated developing a specific training





Théâtre du Mouvement, *Encore une heure si courte*, directed by Claire Heggen.  
Photo: Didier Pruvot

for the piece and a renewed aesthetic, taking into account the human material and the individuality of each of the actors.

At a certain point, I found myself confronted by a chaos which needed organising (fragments of images, situations, rhythmic patterns, character sketches, a proliferation of gestures, etc.). Many dramaturgical trails had appeared and after a *bricolage* of many scenarios (seven), attempts and try outs on stage, losses and gains, the boxes exercised the function of magnets/triggers in

the final script. It can be said definitely that the movement of the boxes in the space determined the narrative.

A production is a living organism, and as such it is subject to principles of uncertainty, complexity, anticipation and action. It is only with time and in the confrontation with the audience that it finds its best form. It is like a good wine, the more it matures, the better it becomes.

It was with this piece, in the confrontation with the object, that I began to formulate the ideas of body-object, body-subject, fictional body, authentic body and going from one to the other, asking the question of the identity of the subject in its relationship to the other, whether it be the object or another subject, to recognise oneself as a complete subject in one's own right, a concept that is particularly important for women who have been too long enclosed in their role as objects.

## TRANSFORMANCE AND PERFORMANCE

Everything happens in the relationship between two elements, in the inter-action, in the "trans": transaction, transformation, transition, transport, transfer.

It is this incessant, sensitive, sensorial, perceptive dialogue (between object and subject) that produces material for theatre, dramatic nourishment for the actor/manipulator: a performance in which the actor's body, objectified by the object, puts itself at the service of the same object.

Information, constraints, resistances: the body is obliged to compromise, to transform. In return the object offers us, in addition, the unforeseen, the unexpected vision of a more interesting dramatic event, an unknown yet recognised event that invites the actor to depart from his or her habitual paths and predictable ways of thinking and moving.

The object dis-places the actors, de-ports them from the centre, de-thrones them, obliges them to be beside themselves. It is precisely in that fragility, that everything happens and that it works. It is the actors' attentive listening to the object, their way of giving "simple attention to simplicity" while touching it, looking or not looking at it, the relation of the two gravities, that makes the spectators prioritise or not to direct their attention towards the object.

The object's inescapable reality allows for a sensitive and non utilitarian relationship between the body and the object. This determines a continuous dialectic, a thought in action, within the artistic practice and makes possible diversity and numerous variations of the triangular relationship of object, the theatrical body (of the actor/manipulator) and the spectator.

It is the relationship - the creation of a relationship between actors, objects, spectators - that is simultaneously individual and collective, directed to the single spectator and to the whole audience, that seems to be the central place on which to concentrate one's dramaturgical or performing attention.

Beyond the simple poetic of the theatrical object (appearance, animism, narration between object and body), it is the modulations of the relationship between object and subject that make at the same time the liaison and the basis for a texture (like the warp and weft in cloth).

A living sensorial text is written in the moment of the relationship. "It" speaks about the relationship between beings. There is relation and relation: putting in relationship and relating (narrative). It is a physical creation of relationship, constantly reactivated and renewed by the object's materiality, that gives birth to a narration carrying meaning that addresses our senses.

Translated from French by Gilly Adams

RAPHAËLLE DOYON (France) teaches theatre theory and practice at the University of Nice and is currently writing a Ph.D. on the actresses of Odin Teatret. She trained at the Jacques Lecoq School and then worked and toured with the physical theatre company Les Semeurs directed by Isabelle Esposito. She has also collaborated on a research project with Théâtre du Mouvement.

CLAIRE HEGGEN (France) is an author, actress, director and teacher. She is co-artistic director of Théâtre du Mouvement and of Centre de Trielle in Auvergne, and co-founder of Transversales, an European Academy of the Art of Movement. With Yves Marc, Claire Heggen has created most of the company's performances amongst which *Les Mutants*, *Tant que la tête est sur le cou*, *Instablax*, *Bugs*, *Si la Joconde avait des jambes*, *Faut-il croire les mimes sur parole?* She teaches at the Institut International de la Marionnette de Charleville Mezières, at the Conservatoire National of Madrid, at the Institut del Teatre of Barcelona, at the Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales of Paris III Sorbonne University, as well as giving international workshops and courses.