

The *Sisyphé* projects – Enora Rivière, august 2007

Projects stories

La Sisyphé was primarily to be a diptych. Conceived in 2003 it consisted of two danced soli, one by a man, the other by a woman, like two proposals of loneliness ordeals in the face of the sheer performative energetic expense governed by the execution of one and the same task.

La Sisyphé, not just 'Sisyphé' as the mythical character* goes by. *La Sisyphé*, the *Sisyphé*, as in a common noun, thus removing the sacred aura surrounding this myth, then becoming a plain demonstrative figure, a personal pronoun that anybody can take over, in which anybody can find something of themselves.

Then *La Sisyphé* turns into *Les Sisyphé*, a plural article followed by a noun left in the singular form, to say the multiplication of one and the same specific figure. It is a piece performed by a group of teenagers, the support of this piece being Julie Nioche's score of leaps, extracted from the initial project. The piece is given as a 20mn-long version of the Doors' song "the End" is playing.

Leaping is often seen only through its "throwing in the air" and "elevation" components, that is to say the moment when one's leaves the ground. The landing, the fall, the ineluctable return to the ground are somehow forgotten, as if to protect the illusion, to preserve the fantasy of a suspension in time and space. That is probably what makes up the graveness, the irrevocability of leaping. As strongly and determinedly as one can jump one is bound to fall back to the ground, to the earth, to our human condition in short. In the act of jumping there is something that is dreadfully, lethally alive; one risks one's hide, it can cost one's life. In French, "leap" translates as "saut", and there is this idiomatic expression : "faire le (grand) saut", "do the (big) leap" . So it is this grave, irrevocable quality of jumping, despite its apparent simplicity, that one can trace in the meanings of this expression. "Faire le saut" can indifferently refer to a hanging, brutal destruction, bankruptcy, the lost of one's virginity etc.

As soon as this term is used in the dancing field one immediately tends to picture scenes from a typical classical dancing imagery. The lightness, the air-borne feeling it evokes, a certain dignity in process. Dance history, specifically classical dancing, made up mythical leaps, mythical pas, thus creating mythical dancers, myths, allegories, images.

There is nothing like that in *La Sisyphé* nor in *Les Sisyphés*. Leaping is here either a lonely performance or a collective activity performed on the spot. It looks much more like the exacerbated conveyance of a given weight that ends up in the taking of the body off the ground, than like a codified dance figure. Here we leap for the sole purpose of leaping, according to different moods, until exhaustion, during 20mn. There is a challenge being taken up.

Of the apparent simplicity of a challenge

The strength of this particular project lies in the simplicity of its proposal : "to take on a challenge", and in the difficulty of its performance : "to leap without a break during 20mn". The apparent absurdity of the situation – to accept somehow to jump all the way on the road to ruin – summons a surpassing of oneself, the necessity of a letting-go. The interest then lies in the way in which each performer copes with the challenge along the length of the performance. It lies in the transformations undergone during the carrying out of a repetitive task. One can then attend the negotiations into which the jumpers enter with themselves. The piece lasts long enough so that one can circulate from a jumper to another and be witness to the evolutions of the physical states, the stances, to the metamorphosis of the facial expressions : a certain placidness, a struggle, glee...

Beyond the challenge, what allows one to achieve the piece is the intention : a look directed straight at the audience and allowing to assume, to assert the absurdity and unproductiveness of what one is performing. The performer thus challenges the audience, obliges it through this look to consent to their common condition. Every one is alone but linked or bound to the others since we are all subjected to the same condition. That is what is told to us through this look, which is by this intendedness a support, a backing up in face of the effort. There are no interactions between the members of the group yet they are all facing the audience and carried by the same music, the track "the End" by the Doors.

A workshop

The act "jumping during 20mn" is possible for everybody yet it does demand a preparation. Some workshops were given in close collaboration with the physiotherapist and Feldenkrais practitioner Gabrielle Mallet, to deliver simple and efficient cognitive tools. Contrary to preconceived ideas and expectations according to which the act of jumping without break during 20mn should require a very performative, physical, lengthy sports warm-up, the workshop proposes exercises, alone or collective experimentations based on proprioception , imaginary representations, relations to space and to the others. It is a matter of learning to develop a self-awareness through the working of feelings, so as to acquire personal strategies in order to thwart tiredness and pain and be able to oscillate between an economy of effort and a real expense of energy. Once the score of leaps had been performed, stretching and relaxation exercises were proposed so as to allow the body a muscular and energetic recovery. The workshop is thus globally thought as both an accompaniment and a space of learning and autonomy.

*Sisyphus was a sinner condemned by the Gods to an eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it roll back down again due to its weight. He was condemned for variously reported indiscretions.