

**INTERVIEW WITH HÉLÈNE ROCHETEAU PUBLISHED IN  
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**INTERVIEW  
WITH  
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**You studied English at the Université François-Rabelais de Tours while training in parallel to dance and theatre. How did dance come into your life ?**

Thanks to a small country dance school when I was a child, where our parents enrolled us with my sisters. Classical and modern jazz dance, annual galas and discovery of the immense pleasure of dancing, which has never left me. Then it was in college that I discovered contemporary dance, thanks to the SUAPS in Tours directed by Véronique Solé, with the interventions of many choreographers, which allowed a beautiful opening on the world of contemporary dance which was unknown to me until then, the discovery of improvisation and a less formal dance.

**In particular, you worked for Magali Milian and Romuald Luydlin (La Zampa), Arnaud Pirault (Groupenfonction), Matthieu Hocquemiller (À contre poil du sens) as well as with the director Philippe Grandrieux... What was the most striking work experience for you ?**

I danced for a long time with the Zampa company and exclusively at the very beginning of my career as a performer - when I was thinking of joining a school - and I trained a lot with them. My approach to movement is very much influenced by martial arts, which I still keep a trace of. It was also and above all the discovery of a universe that spoke to me a lot, of a very demanding work, and where the performers were a force of proposal, with a lot of improvisation in the process of researching each piece. And I still have the joy of participating in a first collective experience, and of developing a long-term research work.

My collaborations with Groupenfonction and Matthieu Hocquemiller have also been outstanding experiences, with the common point of the participatory project, which took me out of the theatre, to discover another relationship with the audience, a real closeness, a real encounter, in a great collective fervour and an immense joy linked to sharing.

And my most striking encounter is certainly the one with Philippe Grandrieux, it is for me a turning point in my journey. There is a before and an after. It was an encounter of absolute obviousness. I realize that I find it difficult to express it in words, because there is a great deal of mystery in the magic of this encounter, which is much more than an artistic encounter. It's like the discovery of the same world, very intimate, shared. Working with him was like diving into the heart of myself. It's a bit mystical, but that's what I felt. The experiences I went through with him required a great commitment, a real abandonment, something quite dizzying. And there was for me an immense joy in allowing myself this vertigo, this plunge into myself, this loss. He created an atmosphere of joy, trust and absolute benevolence, which made this possible.

There is something so solar about him - he is a totally inhabited person, he has something of an animal, or a small child - an energy, a power, something that is unfiltered - it is rare, and that energy is incredibly contagious. He gives a lot and you want to give back... I feel lucky to have crossed his path. As a performer and above all from a human point of view, it's a huge gift. This encounter opened something in me, and in particular allowed me to dare to engage in my own work - a desire that had been smouldering for a long time, and which I hadn't yet fully asserted. This will remain unique and extremely precious.

I am very proud of the films and performances we made together, and beyond these shared experiences, it is a director that I admire enormously, who creates images of unbelievable beauty and strength.

**It is often said that the good performer is not the one who can do everything but the one who makes choices. What do you think of this reflection ?**

Being able to do everything, I don't really know what that means - if it means being very technical and being able to move from one style to another on a rather formal work - if we're talking about dance - then he will be a good performer for choreographers for whom the performers are «technicians». In any case, I'm more affected by the presence, by what emerges from a performer - by the person, his or her particularity - than by what he or she is «capable» of doing. I'm certainly not too interested in that. It would mean in this case that performers can be interchangeable... Do you make choices as an performer, ... or do things just happen naturally, that you have to make the encounters that correspond to you anyway, by going towards what attracts you and therefore probably resembles you? Personally, I have the impression that there are strong links between my different experiences as a performer, and that all of this is a result of my own personal experience.

**In 2013, you sign your first piece: BLAST, a duet with the drummer Jean-Baptiste Geoffroy from Tours. He accompanies all your projects on stage from the very beginning. How did you meet? How did you come to work together ?**

I saw Jean-Baptiste in concert, and his playing, very powerful, his energy, his physical commitment marked me a lot. There was a very immediate desire to react physically to what was happening there. Something also resonated in me, in my own relationship to the body, to movement, and the idea of a confrontation between the two of us came up: the desire for a duo, to try to summon in the body this very raw thing, this tension, this power, and to put the two in resonance. I talked to him about it, he was very interested, it was the first time he was going to work with dance, and so we created Blast, a choreographic concert, with something of the ritual already, and which convokes a very visceral place. And following this first gesture, which confirmed what I had intuitively sensed of a possible encounter, the desire to continue naturally arose. Jean-Baptiste therefore collaborated on the first two parts of La Nuit Manquante, and on the third one currently in creation.

**In 2015, you create a solo, La Nuit manquante I. This marks the beginning of a long adventure, since this piece inaugurates the form of a triptych. Did you have in mind from the start that you were launching yourself into such a form or on the contrary is it something that has taken shape over time ?**

After Blast, I led a research laboratory around trance and image - the genesis of La Nuit Manquante - by inviting dancers, video maker, musician... and the desire for a group piece following this collective experience came rather quickly. I felt that this material that I wanted to dig around the trance, an «intuitive» body would be vast and that it could

be declined in different forms. The idea of the triptych then appeared. I wanted to start with small forms - which seemed to me the most obvious starting point, with first of all a solo that I would perform ; the duo came to me very quickly as well, and I thought of the group piece for the third and last part, therefore. It just seemed right to «tackle» the group piece, perhaps more complex, after first going through these two more intimate forms.

**Can you tell us about the choreographic structure of the solo and the duet? It seems to me that the dance in these first two forms is «hypnotized» by sound and light. The result is a repetitive, stunning dance, with the rhythmic dimension of a ritual dance...**

In these two forms, which have real similarities between them, I wanted to offer a sensory experience, something very immersive. That there be a purely sensory access to the body. By playing on perceptions : by the light, which is often very dim or isolates bodies surrounded by darkness, by a haunting soundscape, by repetition, slowness, a stretched time ; by creating tension, by looking for strong contrasts... to shift the points of reference, to disorient the senses: to open another space where one lets oneself (the performer and perhaps also the spectator) be taken along little by little. If the structure is very written, there remains a part of «open» for the performer, so as not to freeze anything, to be in the present and accept to let himself be crossed by what is happening, with his part of the unknown.

The two pieces open with a sort of prologue, as if to prepare for what is to come. Then we enter into something very concentrated, very fine, in the body and in light - where the smallest piece of information becomes an event. This makes it possible to focus the gaze, to be caught up in what is happening in this body alone. Then follows a very progressive ascent towards a kind of trance, where the body summons a great energy, by exhaustion lets itself be crossed, and thus embodies, by a continuous outpouring of what inhabits it and can no longer contain itself, obscure, enigmatic, universal, archaic images; reminiscences... Which may indeed evoke a ritual dance. The rhythmic dimension is very important in these two pieces; it is each time like one and the same gesture, with steps that should not be missed. It is both open and very precise...

**You quote for these first two Nights (in the artistic file which presents the solo and the duet), words from Tatumi Hijikata. «What would happen if you put a ladder in your body and go down to the bottom? ». Does this mean that butô, which as we know has often focused on the unconscious and darkness, has also nourished your research work ?**

**The encounter with butô has been important in my journey, I found a very strong echo of what I could intuitively look for in dance, without ever having named it ; a vibrant, inner dance, which pushes the body towards a certain radicality, and which summons something of the essence.**



A dance of sensation. There are these words by Carlotta Ikeda that I often think of when I work : «When I dance, there are two «I's» that cohabit: one that is no longer in control, in a state of trance, and the other that looks lucidly at the first one. Sometimes these two «I's» coincide and generate a kind of white madness, close to ecstasy. It is this state that Butô's dancer must be looking for. I dance for this privileged moment». But I am not a Butô dancer ; I did several workshops a long time ago now with Ko Murobushi, Sumako Koseki and Cécile Loyer, which were very important for me and have certainly nourished my work as a performer and choreographer, in an underground way. Through the strong resonance I found there. La Nuit Manquante (and more particularly the first two parts) in this relationship to the dark, to the trance - this body of metamorphosis, this relationship to the «open» ... . without any reference or aesthetic linked to butô, is imbued with it.

**La Nuit manquante III promises to be a brighter, more open piece, more in «relation». The performers are together, attentive to each other, accompanying each other. I am thinking in particular of that moment during the ceremony when one of them, under the benevolent gaze of the others, indulges in an extraordinary experience. Is this a way of saying that today to be a «group» is also a way of supporting and revealing singularities, the personality of each one ?**

Yes, to be able to think of the group as a collective power and enhancer of each person's personality, as a means of revealing it, of strengthening it, and not of dissolving it. I was very marked by reading Starhawk's Dreaming the Dark, written in the early 80s but whose thought resonates very strongly today. It talks a lot about the group, the relationship to the community, and contrasts the notion of «power-on» with «power-in»: «the power of the bottom, the dark, the earth ; the power that comes from our blood, our lives and our passionate desire for the living body of the other», challenged by our mechanistic societies that operate on the principle of distance, with which we are strongly imbued. It invokes another form of consciousness, immanence : attention to the world, and to what it is made up of (...). What might appear to be something very naïve, or utopia from another time, seems to me, on the contrary, essential and fundamental to question. To create a space where to exist in all its singularity, its nudity, its «darkness»; where one takes the time to look at oneself, where the bodies come to invoke together something very subterranean, between desire and fear - this is what I wanted to dig into in this third Night.

**You also wanted to introduce language into this last form, through the use of different sounds, of breath, of song. What was the reason for this ?**

Language distributes power ; it gives body and form to our cultural ways of thinking. I quote Starhawk: «Words that feel good, words that seem acceptable, rational, scientific

and intellectually sound, are good precisely because they are part of the language of distance. »I wondered what a more 'true' language would be like to look for. How can we conjure up a language of sensation, a new language of relationship? How can we account for a state of being in the body through sound ?

**On the occasion of your curious hour (public meeting that ended your residency period at the CCNT), you wanted to summon the public to the board by arranging it around the playground, in a circular manner. It was therefore a new space configuration. What did you think of this experience ? Is it an idea that you will retain for the final form ?**

Ever since I've been making plays, I've always wanted the spectator to be immersed in them - I like to create a relationship of sensations, to create an experience, to address the spectator's guts... There's something of the ritual, of the party, of the ceremony, which is very present in this third part, and for this project this question was even more present than usual. The light designer proposed creating a circle around the dancers and musicians, which we tried, and which created something quite exclusive for the spectators, who were suddenly very outsiders... The question then arose of how to relate to the audience. Should what we are trying to create on stage be shared in a real proximity with the audience ? Are the spectators invited to this ceremony ? Where does the sharing take place ? Doesn't this frontal relationship prevent something from happening ? ... So we tried the experiment at the end of our residency. In the end, this circle comes to me too much in support of the notion of ritual in the traditional sense. It seems more interesting to me to try to invent a ritual without signifying it so much by enclosing it in a very referenced code.