



Next Last

By Di Jayawickrema

On the Galerie Duboys website, you mentioned you discovered "an unexpected passion" for video in 1998, after many years of dance and choreography. Can you recall that time for us? And what was it about video that caught you unawares?

I think it was that I was not really looking for something else at the moment but the small, cheap cameras had just come out and a friend of mine had one. And I borrowed it, I had an idea in my mind and I just started shooting small films, close-ups—very close to the body, and I really discovered something. On the stage, you can't ever do a close-up, not really. It started to work in mind and that's the way I started—to get close to the flesh and to lose yourself in the body. Of course, you know it's a body but you don't know if it's a tit or thigh—you know? It's a way to show the body differently. I shot a series of videos through a window covered in white material with the body sliding down the window but you don't know which part of the body—it gives an interesting feeling. It's sensual and even erotic but not direct like you're used to. And I just became more and more attracted in this direction and I bought a camera but it took me 8 years to show my work. An opportunity arose to show my videos in an interesting project where different video artists showed their work in their apartments. The public would come into my flat and it was like working on intimacy, and my work revolves a lot around intimacy.

The movements in "Sillages" are so balletic, I wondered if you use dancers in your videos? And if you ever use non-dancers, how does it impact the work differently?

Mostly I use dancers because it's easier for me with friends and if you have an idea, with a dancer—with the body—they understand right away what you want whereas with a non-dancer, it will take more time and it may never arrive where you want it to go. In "Sillages" there are dancers as well as non-dancers. I only told them to roll across the bed and it's interesting here to mix dancers and non-dancers to see the different ways they move across the bed, to see the differences in their ease with their own bodies.

In "les mains" - objets perdus," the hands play with the light and with each other—sometimes seriously and sometimes playfully, creating a small drama exactly the way children do when they play. Even "Sillages," which means the wake left by ships in the water, has a similar element of drama and play. Can you talk about the relationship dance and play has for you?

Dance is obvious for me. I am coming from that world; I started when I was seven and I've been doing it for so many years. My vision of the world was informed by movement—I see movement everywhere; I see movement in the street. My eyes are very exercised—I catch little, little things in the street that nobody would notice. Relating that to play, I'm not sure—but I love to play. I think the more you are a grown adult, the more you can relate with your inner child. I think maybe in a more general way, being an artist is playing in a way, it's like a kid. Kids are very creative, as everyone knows, and an artist is this too—whether he is very deep or very light—the results may be different in the end but the process of making art is like playing.

Your Human Form co-exhibitor, Michael McCarthy mentioned how he thought that for both of you the body is a sort of location for experience. Your videos made me think of two quotes about body as experience, one by the 18th century German philosopher Novalis who wrote, "Our bodies are molded rivers" and the other by contemporary writer Michael Ondaatje: "We die containing a richness of lovers and tribes, tastes we have swallowed, bodies we have plunged into and swum up as if rivers of wisdom, characters we have climbed into as if trees, fears we have hidden in as if caves." To me, the first quote presents the body as a place where experiences are collected and the latter as the body moving through experiences of relationships. Which concept do you think relates more to your work?

I think the difference, or one of the differences between me and Michael is that he is shooting himself all the time. He's starting his work from himself. I use other people, almost like a painter, I need a model so it's not directly me—even though it's always you, of course. I don't like photography. I mean, I like Michael's work and I think it's very interesting but in general, I'm not interested in photographs. They are static; there is no movement—I'm a dancer, I need movement. And life is movement. Photography stops something—it's a moment and it stops there—but video is alive. It's difficult to explain; all of us have ideas and we follow those ideas, and some are interesting and some are not so we follow the interesting ones and sometimes they disappear but something else appears. A woman at the exhibition said something interesting to me: She didn't know the order I created the work in but she said she found my last works were more open. She thought the earlier work was more closed—and I had never thought of it that way. Somehow, I am progressing in a way where I give more space for the public to get in, you know? I don't know how it happened but it happened.

Yes, you mentioned in the exhibition press release that you hoped to break down the boundaries between the audience and your work. Did you see that reaction you hoped to inspire in the audience at the opening?

Yes, definitely. Yes, I think it's really working, especially in the video with the shirts—"Habitations."

Can you talk about "Habitations" and the techniques you used there?

Yes, it's very simple. It's a low technique. I'm low tech—not high tech. It's a new thing that is very common using a very small projector—about the size of a pack of cigarettes so you can carry it anywhere. You know, in my life, I am always looking for légèreté—to be, what is légèreté in English? Lightness! So with that object, it is very light and easy to manipulate. I used a very old material that painters use to fix their canvas before they paint to make the shirt stand up by itself without support. My idea was to see if I could project the video of the shirt onto the standing shirt and it worked. At first, I just wanted to see the shirt respire—breathe. In the video, there is only a bust in the shirt—and it's a girl's bust but she has very small tits and many people I ask think it's a male's bust. You're not sure what you're watching. I am always looking for that thing where you're not sure what you're watching. It forces you to go deeper into the image. We see so many images all the time that we have a tendency to see something and to put it in a box—this is this and that is that—so I'm always trying to push something, to make people question things. To ask, what am I watching? What do I feel when I'm watching this?

Yes, your intentions reminded me of the fourth wall concept in theater and film, where the characters "break" the fourth wall—the imaginary boundary between the audience and characters by addressing them directly, which challenges the separation between the two. Can you speak to this?

Yes but my work is not intellectual at all. It's very straight. I think dance or music is direct—there is not an intellectual process to fill it. It's different with theater or books where you use words—dance goes to a different part of you. That's what I'm trying to do with video. I'll give you an example. I did a big installation for Louis Vuitton's trunks. Big, gorgeous trunks from the 18th century onwards and my only direction was "Voyage" so I showed big projections of the sea moving on both walls with a soundtrack of the machinery of boats playing to give the people the sensation of really being there. And I had the floor slightly incline so the body would have to adjust to the tilt of the wood and in the video, there are people really slipping inside the trunks—and it worked, there were people saying "I have to leave, I feel sick."

Your works sometimes look like visions to me, like the way dreams come to a person. Is that how they sometimes come to you?

That is a very difficult question, actually. I don't know. Most of the time, it jumps in my mind. I see something—but it's not directly what it's going to end up being. I go around it and I forget about it and it takes a new form. It's even mysterious to me. If the process of unraveling is resolved, I think will stop making art because otherwise, why are you doing it? It's funny. The exhibition is very nice and I was expecting to be exhilarated when it was all done but I had much more fun in the process of setting it up. It's complicated to build all the pieces—it worked and then it didn't work and then it worked again, as always, but it was fun. But when it's finished, it's finished.

You told me a little bit about the differences between you and Michael. My final question for you is the same one I had for him. In a literal sense, as photographs, his work is "still" while as videos, your work "moves." How do you see your work as conversing with his in terms of commonalities?

Of course, the common point is the body. He does many things to his negatives and when you see the exhibition, there is an obvious community between the two, and what he is doing is very aesthetical. I am aesthetical too. Also, he mostly uses sepia and I only use black and white. I love black and white. Maybe this is from when I was young; I loved black and white things—and there is also something with white and me, like looking for purity, something without any unnecessary things in the sight. And as you said before, it's more like a dream—the black and white creates a lag or gap with reality. You know, for example, in the exhibition, the hands in the water are projected into a sink with real water and then you see a movie with water in it and the question becomes "Is there really water there?" The audience can play with the water, they can plunge their hands into the movie. And that is my intention.

Links:

[Galerie Duboys, Human Form Exhibit, 16 March - 05 May 2012, 6, rue des Coutures St-Gervais, 75003 Paris](#)

[Read Bamboo's interview with Frederique's co-exhibitor Michael McCarthy here](#)



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