

### **Composé/improviser: poésies en mouvement 3. An event at Le Contretemps, Geneva. Richard Price**

A year in the planning, the third *poésies en mouvement* from macaronic.ch presented nine separate works, the first two being the installation 'passi' by Viola Pfister and 'insectuino' by Pierre Dunand Filliol and Alexander Chan A.

Pfister's soundscape, field recordings of the wind re-rendered to a marching rhythm, was activated randomly as visitors surveyed the many poems, in Swiss Italian, with a few translated into French. These Pfister had delicately written out on cards on a hanging device which was half-tree and half-wire fence. There were also blank cards on the structure for visitors to add to their own works, in the spirit of the improvisation of the event – the offer was taken up in gentle eddies of activity by the audience over the length of the evening.

The 'insectuino' is a robot beetle devised by Infolipo artists. It's about the size of a bag of flour. Its two front feet terminate in little crayons. This little motorised creature entered into the improvisational spirit of the evening by drawing randomly on the paper beneath him (he or she appears to be influenced by Cy Twombly in his gentle para-inscriptions phase – and is a delight).

The first performance of the evening was conceived and performed by the choreographer Nathalie Corthay, accompanied by the dancer Nagi Gianni. They began as the audience were still filing in and mulling around in the vicinity of the installations. 'Railroad' is a work adapted to the tiny cave of a place that is the Contretemps, a little like London's 100 Club, but smaller. The couple begin in the curious box created by a transparent emergency door and a further door one pace behind it. Are they in intimate relation to each other, are they suffocating each other? Soon Gianni is lifting, pulling, tugging Corthay through the crowd and into the second room where the night's performances are scheduled to take place. She is reading what might be letters – the kerfuffle and my slow French are inhibitors of comprehension but I'm told later that the text is about the trains of the piece's title (Corthay is also being 'railroaded' by Gianni).

The strange struggle continues. The extraordinary physicality of this piece – it is a work of stylised violence – is played hard against Corthay's purity of concentration as she determines to read her text, almost *be* her text, a harbour wall against the angry male sea. I think of earlier images in art of women contemplating the written word, the world, for example, held at bay by the poise of Vermeer's concentrating, absorbed women. Corthay's work is both a continuation of that theme and an acknowledgement that the world, on the contrary, is brutally incursive and, as a defence against it, the word is almost as desperate a recourse as any other.

The piece ends in silence, with Corthay abandoned in a corner, a projector merely stamping the symbol of light – a torch – on the lower part of the wall where she lies, its flicker making her face all the more pale.

The work by Marina Salzmänn and Alexa Montani finds Montani improvising stark, infrequent notes at the upright piano (sometimes reaching into its carcass to strike its bones directly). Salzmänn stands as

if transfixed, centre stage. Behind her, to her left, a projection of skaters on ice appears intermittently. Montani improvises to Salzman's improvisations and vice versa: the tone is an expectation of rapture, or a memory that is frustrated by its inability to articulate such pleasure.

A change of tone entirely for the next piece. Have you had your manicure, yet? If so, you may now proceed to play the gramophone record, using each brightly-red-varnished nail as a stylus. Olivia Adate, accompanied by Nathalie Corthay working the levels, carries out live scratching on vinyl records. She creates sonic surfscapes from the crackle and static, with transducer wires from her finger tips out to the public address system.

Next is the piece by the poets Peter McCarey and Richard Price and electronica musician Pierre Dunand Filliol (whose robot co-creation we've seen earlier). 'Drones', as introduced by McCarey, uses a four-mood structure to offer a 'drone' that, rather than being a machine of summary execution, is musical and expressive (though a sinister tone is never far from the performance, and the weapon returns right at the end of the piece).

Four poems from McCarey's monumental syllabary project, backed by Filliol's at times ethereal analogue Moog, highlight both the gravel in McCarey's voice and the uncanny precision of his Scots English lexis. In a shock development Price appears to have finally both raised his volume at readings and mastered the microphone (not least, one suspects, because of the work by Thierry Simonet, more often a sound poet in his own right but tonight the engineer holding everything in place). Price observes the four-part structure with a combination of lyricized but fragmented narrative, mimicry of domestic communications – "There's a call for you!" he sings out – , a short riff on non-verbal exclamations of disappointment ("Aw-aw!") and the final account of what must be the drone-led killing of two children in 'occupied territory'.

The two poets finish the piece stock still for a whole minute as Filliol reprises the sounds of military aircraft and heavenly jangle (a cicada? a buzzsaw? or the tinnitus of angels described in McCarey's prefatory piece?).

Colette and Günther Ruch's "Blätterteig" places each at a separate card table, facing each other. Between them, but set back, is a projection. The theme is cards and the sort of cup and ball game you still sometimes see played in the street, onlookers gambling on what cup conceals the ball. Either performer may call out a number and when they do this seems to change the direction of the performance. As with so many of the evening's pieces a system does not seem to obliterate the human scale: rather, there is a polarisation, a 'parallel foregrounding', even a valorisation of both. In this way, when, early on in the piece, the projection hiccups and this is not apparently intended, Colette Ruch's equally unplanned exclamation – "Problème" – seems in keeping with it all. The performance is soon back on track, with a terrifically clicky sound texture for the cups as they are being placed on the pingpong balls.

Yvan Borin and Pierre Thoma's work also positions two performers at tables facing each other. This time the tension of the game is gone altogether – this is the transaction of tedium, almost a Beckett of the office.

Finally Pierre Audétat's three short video works plunder YouTube for multiscreen antics. Perhaps the most achieved is an affectionate homage

to orchestra conductors and even M. Moog himself, with some witty sugar icing in the shape of a one-note appearance by piano-ham Richard Clayderman.

This was a fascinating and stimulating evening. In conception the closest I know is the PolyPly programme of text-based performances (<http://polyply.wordpress.com/>), run under the auspices of Royal Holloway, University of London, and also some of the performances within Jeff Hilson's Xing [ie Crossing] the Line reading series, again, London-based.