

Movement on Movement

by Noé Soulier

In the *Improvisation Technologies*, William Forsythe displays different ways of conceiving, performing and looking at movements. This display takes the form of short demonstrations where he improvises while explaining the tools he uses to improvise. These tools are mostly geometrical: points, lines, curves, relationships and vectors which stimulate and/or analyze the movements of the body through space. They are represented on the screen by lines added during postproduction. These demonstrations are primarily didactic. According to the booklet that comes with the CD-ROM, they were conceived at first to help dancers entering in company to get used to William Forsythe's approach to movement. They are not meant as autonomous choreographic sequences. That is the shift I would like to create: what happens if these demonstrations are treated as a choreographic material and not as a pedagogical material?

I will perform the sequences from the CD-ROM *Improvisation Technologies* as faithfully as I can, but I won't reproduce William Forsythe's speech, I will only keep the movements. These sequences are heterogeneous: there are short dance improvisations that stand on their own, but also movements that explain and comment on the way of improvising itself. There is an explanatory and demonstrative dimension within the movements themselves. One can distinguish two levels of movements in the demonstrations: the dance movements, and the gestures that comment on these movements (pointing, indicating, tracing, underlining...). It is this demonstrative dimension of movement that especially interests me.

As I am performing the sequences from the *Improvisation Technologies*, I will talk about the way dancers act on themselves in different choreographic practices and about the implications of these actions aimed at oneself. This reflection is grounded on the research I am developing within the philosophy department of the University Paris IV. Here is an excerpt of the text that will accompany the movement sequences: In William Forsythe's improvisation technique, movements are defined by geometrical vectors. You assign a vector to a specific body part - for example the knee - to determine its trajectory in space. The rest of the body is free to adapt itself as it can to this geometrical constraint. This produces many residual movements that are completely unpredictable. My knee becomes an object manipulated by the rest of my body, and my body becomes heterogeneous. It separates itself between the motor part and the mobile part. My knee is the mobile: it is that which is moved, whereas the rest of my body is the motor: it is that which leads the movement. My knee is objectified. It becomes the object upon which the rest of my body acts. In daily movements, I usually act upon the external world. My movements are oriented towards practical goals such as moving an object, transforming it, or manipulating it. My body tends to disappear behind the goals it gives itself. We usually think about the final goal of our action and not about the specific movements we perform to accomplish it. When you entered the room you may have thought about finding your seat, but you were probably unaware of all the movements you did in order to get there.

Now my movements are defined geometrically, and their goal is located within my own body. My movements are not oriented towards the external world but towards my body itself. That's why a part of my body is objectified. Instead of manipulating external objects, I manipulate a part of myself which I treat as an object. My body retracts within itself and my knee becomes foreign to my own body. It's the opposite of what happens when we incorporate an external object. When we use a tool a lot, it's integrated in our body schema: our motor system treats it as a part of our own body. There are some experiences from cognitive sciences that are quite striking on

this topic. At another level, the French philosopher Canguilhem talks about tools as projected organs. In *Machine and Organism*, he writes: "the first tools are only the extension of human organs in motion. The flint, the club, the hammer prolong and extend the organic movement of percussion of the arm". So my body can extend itself beyond its material limits by incorporating external objects, and it can retract within itself by objectifying parts of itself. The hammer can become an organ and my knee can become an object.

Most of the time, I will talk while dancing, but at times I will concentrate exclusively on the discourse or on the movement, these different options creating different kinds of presence and physical states. I will also play with the relationship between the discourse and the movements that are performed: proximity, distance, independence, correspondence, parallelism, friction, contradiction... The first movement material I will work with will be the demonstrations from the *Improvisation Technologies*, but I might include other materials. I will especially look for movement sequences that are not originally conceived for the stage: classes, workshop, demonstrations, lectures, interviews, etc. William Forsythe expressed his interest in the project. He agreed to the use of the material from the *Improvisation Technologies* and proposed to start a conversation. This exchange started in Frankfurt in November 2012 and it is now going on, and it will probably transform the project itself and yield materials that could be included in the piece.