

Stewardship: Interview with Florence Corin and Baptiste Andrien

Anouk Llaurens

Introduction

Florence Corin and Baptiste Andrien are working for *Contredanse* since 1998. There they edited two DVD ROMs: *Material for the Spine* with Steve Paxton and *Dancing Life* with Anna Halprin.

Florence Corin used to be an architect with interest in dance. Her final study was a work about how choreographic notation could be applied on representation in architecture. Patricia Kuypers the founder of *Contredanse* invited her to join the team for the review *Nouvelles de danse*. Florence had not been editing books before. The turning point with the medium happened for her with the dance and interactivity review, when they were publishing a CD-ROM as a result.

Baptiste Andrien also started off as an architect, fascinated with space and making movies. When he was invited for a workshop with Lisa Nelson in 2001, the physical experience and the body started to have more impact in his work. Few years later Florence invited him to work with *Contredanse* on a DVD about Body Mind Centering®. They created a film and a publication together from the workshop, which was organized after the translation of the book ‘Sensing, Feeling and Actions’ in French.

Currently they are working on a new project with Lisa Nelson.¹

Material for the Spine, Steve Paxton

Anouk Llaurens: You produced and edited two DVD-ROMs, *Material for the Spine* in 2008, followed by *Dancing Life* with Anna Halprin in 2014. Can you share with us the process of creating these works? Let’s start with Steve Paxton. Did you have any strategies to start with?

Florence Corin: We did not know that we would end up with a DVD-ROM at the beginning. It started with a question from Patricia Kuypers. She wanted to have a publication on Steve Paxton’s project and asked him for many years if he wanted to work with *Contredanse* as editor. He always answered that he was not interested to focus on his past, his background, or his pieces. Finally, he agreed to our proposition to make more than a publication of his work and we started to talk.

Anouk: Did you start a research together?

Florence: We decided to focus on *Material for the Spine*: the movement research that Steve worked on for ten years. At the beginning the idea was that Steve was writing a book and we would make a film. The project started in Mal Pelo's space in Spain, *L'animal a l'esquena*. We worked together with Patricia Kuypers, Steve, Scott Smith, Charley Morrissey and me during one week. We practiced all the forms of *Material for the Spine* and discussed how to film them. **Steve was saying that the dancing could only be transmitted in the studio, through workshops. To translate dance to another medium was not the point at the beginning.**

Anouk: How to film dance was a question?

Florence: Yes, the question was present from the beginning. Steve had a list of exercises he wanted to film, like *the double helix roll*, *the crescent roll*, *the aikido roll*. But we did not find a satisfying way to film them. In addition **Steve wanted to show invisible or very small things. He proposed the glass table as another way of perceiving the body through the contact of the flesh on the glass.**

Anouk: It is a way to see the action of gravity while the body is suspended in the dark.

Florence: Patricia proposed to make interviews with Steve. I remember a lot of frustration in this first period. There were a lot of desires and very few satisfying material. But at the end of this period we knew that we needed to film *aikido rolls*. Steve invited us to film a workshop he was giving in Seattle, and Baptiste joined the project. It was in an Aikido studio, the floor was good to practice *aikido rolls*. We filmed and recorded everything. **It became our basic material and Baptiste transcribed it.** We also organized two workshops with Steve, in Brussels and in Paris, two times two weeks. After filming and audio recording the three workshops, we had the entire base. We could then play with the material. We made a lot of transcriptions in order to classify the material and worked with key words.

Baptiste Andrien: Seattle was the first workshop we assisted too. But we did not participate as dancers. **At that time we were talking about a crystal form as a first understanding of what the work could be, as a first image of a structure, rising from what we knew about the work.**

Anouk: Were you looking for a structure as an analogy for the material?

Baptiste: After Seattle we started to practice. The workshop in Brussels and Paris was actually a way for us to start embodying it, to get a physical taste of it. **It was the key point when we started to transcribe and kept the physical practice in parallel.**

Florence: We also created a private website to communicate with Steve. We called it *Radio Steve*. It was audios being edited from the workshop, classified with key words. I remember a yellow line of thirty keywords about Steve's concepts. You could click and have all the correspondent edited audio, all the extracts from the workshop.

Baptiste: The first 'embryo' of the future DVD-ROM was audio.

Florence: At this point we began with the idea of crystal form. For me, it was also the crystallized form what Steve built for *Material for the Spine*. It was very precise, strict, and formalized. The whole process of editing the DVD-ROM took five years. *Radio Steve* was about the notions we wanted to have in the publication. More or less at the same time, we started to think about a nonlinear edition where people could navigate. **We had this idea because of Steve's way of reflecting, which was nonlinear but rather following a line than jumping to something else – making digressions.**

Baptiste: It took five years to meet Steve's research and Steve as a researcher. Until the end we had nothing. The DVD-ROM, the final object was not there until the last year. **The choice for the DVD-ROM was informed by how we understood Steve's work.** The second part, *Sensation and Senses* was a way to present how we embodied the work and what kind of questions rose from our process as editors. It is directly in dialogue with the medium – with video. We talked a lot about how to address the viewer and set up situations where the images could talk to them. When we needed something about space, we created the situation for filming short lectures. Steve was using our transcriptions as a support, and finally he improvised every lecture. These new resources were created and filmed at the end of a four years process. It was our conclusion.

Anouk: You said earlier that Steve was not interested in his past. I find interesting the idea of a documentation that is considering the present and even the future.

Baptiste: It was a nice loop with somebody that did not want to be filmed and did not want to capture, to stabilize, or put things in a box.

Anouk: Probably it was important to have the time to create such a document and articulate something so specific about Steve's work. You also had the budget for five years!

Baptiste: That was really a luxury. We had the chance to have funds for that and that is rare.

Anouk: From the Belgium government?

Florence: A lot came from *Contredanse* but not only. We also had the support from *L'animal al escena*. One of our particularities is that we are putting our hands in the process: we film, we edit. I don't remember how many hours we edited the videos. At the end we could talk as Steve!

Baptiste: It was collaboration. Steve says that we choreographed him and that he was pleased being choreographed in that project. That was interesting because it was not his demand.

Florence: He changed his mind a lot during the process. At the beginning images were just a small part of the project. After a while, Steve realized that it was not the right moment for the book and the project became the DVD-ROM.

Baptiste: What was also very clever from Steve's part was to wait a long time for us to get to know something. To know in order to have, well, **I don't know what it is to know**, but after five years we knew a little something of something. There was information in our bodies, in our imagination that had substance enough to start something. Steve entered at that moment. If that had happened earlier, he would have

told us what to do. **He choreographed us in his waiting. He waited for something to be cultivated, like in martial art or any practice where you wait until somebody brings a strong desire.**

Anouk: You have to convince the master.

Baptiste: Yes, he was waiting until you have something you come with.

Florence: **The time we had in the studio was very precious. We could experiment, try things, and think about more relevant situations.** I remember an interesting moment when we tried to transmit how Steve was correcting people in the studio while they were practicing the rolls. After a while, we realized that the corrections had to be addressed to the viewer. We projected the film of the rolls and asked Steve to correct the film. **We passed from 2D to another representation that worked much better.**

Baptiste: We mostly had to do all evaluations ourselves. Steve was not so much guiding what we should do at that time.

Florence: It was our concern, as editors, to place him in the situation of watching himself dance. It is a succession of representation.

Anouk: **Layering of representation?**

Florence: We discovered that the best way to transmit something in another medium is to play with layers.

Baptiste: One of the things that interests me the most today, is how one gives value to what is there. **You have an object, a document, a form, a dance piece, an edited form, or anything: what do you value out of that?**

Anouk: As a reflexive process?

Baptiste: How do you feedback something? Then, when informed, what are your choices? This is what we are experiencing now with Lisa Nelson. We are working directly on that question with her.

Anouk: You are working on the question of feedback and how it is giving value to something?

Baptiste: Yes, in a way. **Learning about what you are doing, because you have to make a first move in order to get a first feedback.** But then, what's the content of the feedback? What is the nature of the feedback? This is really fascinating. During the process with Steve and Anna Halprin, the feedback was happening between Florence and me. It was internal.

Anouk: Because you are working as team, two people in dialogue?

Baptiste: Yes, sometimes we were even editing the same sequence.

Florence: In the work with Anna that was great. Let's present Anna's project now.



— Photograph by Baptiste Andrien (Contredanse). Florence Corin (Contredanse) and Anna Halprin in the process of recording resources for the publication 'Anna Halprin – Dancing Life', Sea Ranch (USA), July 2011.

Anouk: After Steve Paxton you worked with Anna Halprin.

Florence: We first translated *Moving Toward Life: Five Decades of Transformational Dance* – the book Anna Halprin made with Rachel Kaplan as editor. We followed the same process than for the Body Mind Centering® publication. We translated the book in French, we invited Anna to give a workshop and we made a new publication. The project started when we went to Seattle to receive an award for *Material for the Spine*. From there, we made a little trip to visit Anna. We already had in mind to publish material from her workshop. We also wanted to interview her and choose extracts from her archive to illustrate the workshop.

Baptiste: We did not know the final form from the beginning but we thought about a DVD-ROM.

Anouk: Is it because people can interact with it?

Baptiste: Yes. We filmed Anna's workshop in Paris and worked with Julie Numrich, one of her ex-student, to understand its structure and the underlying tension present within the different activities Anna proposed. **Finally, we made a grid of the workshop to start dialoguing with her. Anna would approve or disapprove the way we would name and give titles. Because we think that a workshop is boring to watch, we wanted to shorten everything to get to the essence of the teaching.** As you see in the DVD-ROM,

we propose a title for each activity, as a filter to read the content through Anna's mind: how she would structure the workshop, and what motivated her choice to propose activities in this specific order. We also had interview with her about the workshop in order to have another kind of material. At a certain point **we needed to understand where things were coming from, so she gave us access to her archive.**

Anouk: It was like going back in time.

Baptiste: Yes. We started to look at the phases in time and note important events in her life that would structure her career and her personal transformations.

Florence: We wanted to link it to the tools that she developed in her practice. When we travelled to San Francisco the first time, we made a drawing to summarize how we perceived the two days workshop in Paris. For Anna, it was really coming from her past. It was like an hourglass. The workshop was just one moment; it was contingent to the situation and the people present in the workshop. We wanted to contextualize it. The first time we went to Anna's place, we offered her the Steve Paxton DVD-ROM. The second time we arrived, she had a clear idea in mind of what the publication could be. She talked about it and started to structure it herself in relation to the way she perceived her past, her life, her tools, and the Life Art Process®. **She tried to structure it the way she processes her workshop.**

Baptiste: We knew from beginning that there were already a lot of documents, like films and books, about her work but not so much about her teaching. Anna has a lot of experience in giving workshops. It is a very specific situation where she is sharing a lot of her questions and what has value for her. After the workshop in Paris we felt that it was worth to document this aspect of her work.

Anouk: It seems that there is a lot of subjectivity involved in these documentation processes.

Baptiste: It is a meeting between our subjective reading and theirs. Anna was giving a lot of feedback along the process. We tried to explain her as much as possible what we were doing. She was 90 years old at that time, and still, we could talk about the DVD -ROM and technological aspects with her.

Florence: Some choices came from our personal intuition. Baptiste took part in the workshop. I just went to the lecture. I discovered the material through the video recording of the workshop. It was interesting to have these two different entrances and ways to perceive it. A lot came from our working practice.

Anouk: Did you feel that you could apply some of your experience with Steve Paxton to Anna's project, or did you have to understand something new?

Baptiste: Always new. But we mostly know what we don't like. Anna Halprin is more an archive project.

Florence: Steve is presenting his dance technique but it is more artistic.

Anouk: Do you mean that he presents the content in a more artistic way?

Baptiste: With Anna you get inspiration from the content. With Steve tried to use video as a form to inspire people and also to allow for a kinesthetic experience – to touch them, touch their imagination.

Florence: We are placing ourselves at the service of the artist, even if we are starting from our sensitivity. Our starting point is our body, our way to perceive the technique, the material. We want to deal with these two sides of the work: the physical experience and the relation with the medium that documents it.

Baptiste: It's a constant negotiation. We know that there is a threshold. When one overcomes it with her own aesthetic, we have to rebalance in order to serve the project. We know it's not our work, it's someone else's and we are giving our time and experience in order to support that.

Anouk: But as you said, it is negotiation between all the people involved. Who have the final decision? The artist, right?

Baptiste: Ah yeah!

Florence: It depends, sometime we discuss about things. As editors we arrive to an agreement with the artist. We keep in mind that we are editors. At the beginning, Steve didn't want to show his pieces but as editors we thought it was important for the viewer to have access to this material too. We are thinking about what is good for the dance culture. It's another position. During the Body Mind Centering® meeting, in Gent in June 2015, we realized how our choices of word were influencing the dance culture, and how we are telling the history have an impact.

Baptiste: Or just a story!

Florence: I remember someone reflecting about the title of the review *Incorperer*...

Anouk: It means *embodied* right?

Baptiste: Yes. But do you consider the English word *embodied* or the French word *Incorperer*? In *De l'une à l'autre*, one of our publications, there is a nice dialogue about that question. *Embodied* in English, does not mean the same thing than in the Body Mind Centering's® terminology for example.

Baptiste: *Contredanse* made a choice for a title and now people are referring to that word.

Florence: To come back to the DVD-ROM and interactivity, it's a way not to face a linear story, to say to viewer that it's up to them to follow their nose. For Anna's DVD-ROM, we decided to publish some important archive but people have to create their way and compose with them.

Baptiste: This is going along with what *Contredanse* did for so long: not giving a discourse on someone else's work, but bringing the work to light. There are many editors or publishers who would probably support discourses on people's work, and it is great. Even if we might publish one of those, it is not our main activity. There are already so many resources in dance that wait to be put in light, still so many works that are burdened.

Anouk: You mean not yet accessible?

Baptiste: To make it accessible is enough for us. If other people want to make discourse or reflect about the work of the artist that's fine, but that's not what we are choosing to do. We are going for the work itself – how we are experiencing somebody else's work, but we are trying to avoid the discourse. **Our opinion makes the form. We are enacting our opinion by doing it.**

New Project with Lisa Nelson



— Photomontage by Baptiste Andrien (Contredanse) presenting the *Tuning Game* with Lisa Nelson and Baptiste Andrien, Brussels, January 2017.

Anouk: Now you are working with Lisa Nelson on a video game.

Florence: It's working as an analogy. It seems relevant for us because Lisa came from dance, went to video, and then returned to dance. She created the *Tuning Score*, and now we work on a way to apply *Tuning Score* back to video or 3D. We just arrived to a prototype where two players can edit a video together in real time, with similar score than Lisa's.

Anouk: Do you mean they edit the video using the calls from *Tuning Score*?

Florence: Yes, as a mean to be aware of how you are watching the video, how your attention is following your desire or listening to someone else's desire. Just in this process, we are facing the fact that sometimes it's not enough just to play with the video to really get the essence of what Lisa's *Tuning Score* can bring in terms of attention. Now we are trying to have a prototype for 3D objects to get more direct to the point of how we deal with attention and composition. We are facing technological problems. Video: we can do ourselves. But for the 3D issue: we don't have the knowledge. We know each other so well, Baptiste and I, it is quite easy to work together. The question we have now is how to integrate other people in our team that could bring the technology but also understand our way of working.

Anouk: You want to collaborate with someone that understands that you start from an embodied experience of the work you want to document?

Florence: Yes. Our first meeting with the tech guy was funny. We invited him to play Lisa and Scott Smith's "GO" score. We wanted to start from the practice. Maybe from there he could understand our way of seeing the documentation process. We started the discussion again from the body understanding.

Baptiste: In the case of Lisa's, the work is not about a certain content to be documented but about a tool. The content is the tool. Lisa does not say how to dance but how you can play your attention and your desires. It is just about making explicit what one does already. She does not invent anything; she just brings what is already there to light. Then she is dancing it. In a workshop situation she is also providing space to make these decisions more conscious, and to become aware of how we compose our experience. So far, Lisa is not very keen on us to film a workshop. However she is giving so many basic tools in her workshop! Even in four hundred years, who would say we don't have attention anymore? And Lisa is not only talking about attention. **She is giving tools to be able to measure how it works for you and to play with others. She is giving tools to play your desire and opinion.**

Florence: Now, for Lisa's project, we have a multi-platform idea and also the idea of a video game. We would like to offer it for free on the Internet. We would also like to have a publication on Lisa's practice in parallel, for people to understand where these games come from. It is complex, because it is not only us. It's also a question of economy, of subsidies. We need to find enough support to be able to do that. We begin with Lisa's desire and will see what we'll do next.

NOTES

1. Contredanse, Brussels June 2016.