



**soit le puits était profond,  
soit ils tombaient très lentement,  
car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour.**

*(2005)*



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2005

**proposition, set design, costumes and objects** : christian rizzo

**music** : gerome nox + didier ambact

**light installation** : caty olive

**performers / builders**: didier ambact, éric grondin, hélène liatchet,  
wouter krokaert, éric martin, gerome nox, tamar shelef,  
maria donata d'urso, david wampach

**production manager** : jean-michel hugo

**sound** : roland auffrey

**duration** : 1h 15

**production** : l'association fragile

**co-production** : Théâtre de la Ville de Paris – Centre National de la Danse de Pantin – Le Quartz,  
Scène Nationale de Brest – Perspectives Festival, Saarbrücken (Germany) – Centre National de la  
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**Since 2007, l'association fragile / Christian Rizzo has been in residence at the Opéra de Lille.**

1

Madonna sings *Everybody wants to go to Hollywood*

H. D. Thoreau advocates living in the woods.

I listen to one while reading the other, then fall asleep in a strange spatial blend where rhinestones become tribal and the feeling of the wind a spectacular trick.

2

A few days later, coming out of a performance, I discuss knitting, weaving, openwork and embroidered fabrics with a new acquaintance.

The same evening, I dream of a hotel room. Room # 29.

I've been staying there for a long time.

Around me, everything I call "connections" turns into a gossamer network developing horizontally.

I notice that it is elastic and can support me.

I use it like a trampoline and jump on it frenetically, inventing figures to reach the ceiling, the top of the inner dome of my own skull.

3

Sometimes I listen to Jankelevitch's classes at the Sorbonne on temptation, and the time being.

Lost in the meaning, I focus on the musicality of the speech, the extreme tension of the living.

Between understanding with my brain and with my senses, I feel at home, in the vision I have of performance.

4

Yesterday, today and certainly tomorrow: shadows, ghosts....

What drives me.

What moves me.

Vanities!

"One can, after all, live without a certain something,

as one can live

without philosophy, without music, without joy and without love. But not as well."

**Vladimir Jankelevitch.**

### **Some working notes :**

# Because I consider today that there is no other concept or fiction in theatre than that of removal, of distance (of death?),

I wonder how the question of the sexual resonates?

# To build a strange, perhaps foreign land, where playing with the appearance is practiced by shaping, cutting and transforming in aid of a body as support involved in the advent of the figure, the oblique, the motif, avoiding the character, and without a centre.

# To have absences, introduce bodies which – while reflecting each other – carry out movements in a negative version of their presence.

To embody one's own ghost?

# Contemplation is not fascination, it allows you to look back, to question yourself when confronted with an object.

...from what lies on paper to what lies before your eyes.

# The body as material for exploring shapes and volumes, fluctuating voids and solids, presence charged with absence.

# Not say, but emit collisions, frictions where references and imaginations weave an open-plan structure of moving definition, *intaglio*.

# For an architecture of time. Of molecular formalism.

# The polyphony of presences, danced actions. To enact the spiral with a moving centre.

# Looking is music, this way it tells us about time, hence the memory and potentialities of perceiving the future of things

# Can the ornamental be considered a completely distinct entity and not a “decorative” addition?

# Saraband, masquerade, bestiary, *danses macabres*...

## press clips

“Christian Rizzo has just premiered at the Quartz de Brest *Soit le puits était profond, soit ils tombaient très lentement car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour* (Either the well was deep, or they fell very slowly because they had the time to look around). In this polymorphous piece, the stage is not a platform, it is an abyss.

Do we ask ourselves who, in dance and theatre, truly succeeds at creating their own universe? It is not easy to say, precisely because the shapes and the images found in them do not reflect any recognisable landscape, yet they have their own mysterious eloquence. The piece touches us in ways we do not immediately comprehend, there is the confusion, both worrisome and agreeable, that we experience, a sensation which may be strongly received by the reflected gaze coming off *soit le puits était profond, soit ils tombaient très lentement car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour*, the polymorphous creation by Christian Rizzo. It would be bad faith to deny that when we confront this happily unnerving piece, we find ourselves trapped in a new and singular universe. And afterwards? What alchemy is at work here? To believe that imagination alone can fertilise a world, would be to keep alive the portrait of the artist as a *deus ex machina* [an offstage deity or force], which our contemporaries have learned to defy. Rizzo is neither demiurge nor deity, and the poeticism which he reveals comes from his imagination as well as from an interlacing of materials and densities where the presence of bodies, like the interplay of masses of sound and staging converge in their reality, pulling away from all tangible realism. An astonishing metamorphosis which depends upon that which is visible to help us to perceive the obscure depth of the abyss at the heart of all our actions.

“The theatre is a paradoxical place, both in the present and in memory. But it is also a place where we create visions,” he says, knowing what he is talking about: *soit le puits était profond, soit ils tombaient très lentement car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour* unfolds in a dreamlike time which can only belong to the theatre. Moving against the precipitation characterising our time and its media-related representations, Christian Rizzo is a contemplative, eager to “come back down to where we can see things, take the time to observe instead of showing or showing off.” (3) At the beginning of the piece, there are twinkling night-lights around the white surface of the bare, elevated stage. One by one the dancers arrive, put their dance bags down, gather around a microphone and speak private words into it: the choreographer had asked the dancers to make lists of people, places and memories that had particularly affected them. Then these murmuring voices, barely understandable, meld into a sort of indistinct hooting. For whom does the bell toll now?

The stage fills with glimpses of glimmering silhouettes wearing coloured underclothes and regular clothes, which could technically be part of a dance scene – then switches to the opacity of ephemeral, solitary trajectories. The unity of the floor is undone by white monoliths forming partitions and gaps. And the figures which were familiar and human in nature are now extravagant, unsettling, even misshapen. This disintegration of space and identity happens without any frenzy, in a continuous crossfading of transformations (accompanied discreetly by the wonderful lighting of Caty Olive). Only the music by Gerome Nox and Didier Ambact, contrasting with this display, this “polyphony of presence,” maintains a constant rolling, rhythmical, percussive deluge of sound. “Triggering collisions, frictions where references and imaginations create a landscape-like, concave, moving structure,” writes Rizzo in his work notes.

From beginning to end, *soit le puits était profond, soit ils tombaient très lentement car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour* is structured around the idea of falling. The idea is largely used and sometimes abused in contemporary dance, rejecting the quest for elevation so popular in ballet, in exchange for an earthbound body pulling its life energy out of the ground. As the title says (borrowed from Lewis Carroll), the falling body does not have that consonance here, it enters a cadence of experience and perception – more a willingness to let go. Or, as the choreographer said, “to accept the void in order to defy our fear of nothingness.” The stage, more than a platform, is an abyss. The final sequence, which may also be channeling some strange funeral rite, is instead the culmination of this patient excavation of an “interior well” at the edge of which all the balancing wavers.”

**Jean-Marc Adolphe, *Mouvement* - June 9, 2005**

### **At the edge of his own abyss**

“The choreographer Christian Rizzo, in residence at the Quartz in Brest, will present today and tomorrow, his latest work, **soit le puits était profond, soit ils tombaient très lentement car ils eurent le temps de regarder tout autour (Either the well was deep or they fell very slowly because they had the time to look around)** (1). This elongated title is appropriate since the dancers do indeed fall, in slow motion, into crevices created onstage. The piece is absolutely uncluttered, although also somewhat radical. The artist, who has a definite interest in the plastic arts, still lifes and even death – steps carefully toward his own truth. He seeks. And he finds it. (...) The work presented today in Brest literally teeters on the edge of an abyss, still, glacially cold. A bone thoroughly gnawed by a dog. There are only a few objects onstage, it is all white. Stage right is a bouquet of microphones where seven dancers come to speak, one after the other. The poignant sounds are then multiplied digitally by the expert hands of G r me Nox and Didier Ambact. There is a drum set, played live. The bodies fall, rise again, go to the mikes to add to the blending of sounds and sighs. Some of them undress, others get dressed, crying out for the last time, still holding a single shoe. They may be the damned, the victims of horrific traffic accidents. The choreographer, a voracious reader, also “writes” in his fashion for the stage, leaving a number of important clues. The action is double-jointed, the movements deliberately assembled out of order, voluntarily eschewing narration. A memorial candle fuels the feeling of death surrounding these bodies on the ground who rise again.

Christian Rizzo is constantly changing the meaning of his movements. Instead of a podium, this time he opts for a full-scale dismembering of the stage by the dancers. It is they, co-authors of the work, who modify the space. In these dangerously gaping crevices, half-visible bodies fall and are caught upside down. From the devouring deep emerges someone’s leg, someone else’s arm.”

**Muriel Steinmetz, *L’Humanit *, May 10, 2005**

### **Seven dancers inexorably falling and rising to fall again**

“Presented at the Th atre de la Ville in Paris before going to the Avignon Festival, *soit le puits ...* apparently the Zen vehicle of furtive changing sensations, somewhere between voracious appetite and simple detachment, reflects Christian Rizzo’s slightly disturbing connection to life. His passion for beauty is a mere guard-rail separating him from the world’s absurdities, an elegant detour in his advance toward the end.

In ninety minutes, the seven dancers do indeed dig this “well,” and their cries, almost lamentations, match the ghosts, the shadows of those who are no longer with us. They fall and rise inexorably, alone or with someone else, but it is together they slide into the depths, only to reappear, stiff as zombies, passing in front of a clown with green hair.

The choreographer’s movements are spectacular, fluid. He spent time at the Villa Arson in Nice, and these shapes reflect somewhat the work of the German plastician and director Oskar Schlemmer. In *soit le puits...*, Rizzo’s extensive research translates to the visible volume on the stage, constantly being rearranged by the performers who disappear little by little behind the vivid colours of their costumes and masks. The lighting of Caty Olive joins in this conspiracy against Death, and the score, by G r me Nox and a dazzling Didier Ambact) spins around the stage without disturbing its action, minimal as it may be.

Since *100% polyester* (reviewed in *Le Monde*, June 21, 1999), Christian Rizzo explores his limpid, precise visions, touched by the void and its cousin, nothingness. Their mutual attraction resides in the

palpable love Rizzo has for the “black box” space and his ability to reconfigure reality according to the laws of poetry. Playing with both images and emotions, he drifts instinctively on a fragile skiff of pure beauty which, even wounded, makes us feel good.”

**Rosita Boisseau, *Le Monde*, June 30, 2005**