

et l'impossibilité de sa présence pleine et entière. La démarche bancal d'une femme qui a cassé son talon. La sensation d'être habité tout au long de la lente, lente chute de ce corps. Le fait que nous vivons avec ce corps. Son immobilité qui est néanmoins mouvement. Et tout le long : la permanence calme d'une vie, ici, dépouillée, devant nous.

Peu avant la fin. Elle ouvre une couverture métallisée ; celle qu'utilisent les coureurs du marathon lorsqu'ils franchissent la ligne. Après l'endurance, la chaleur, qu'offre le plus fragile des objets, doré et très mince. Elle s'en enveloppe maladroitement — ambivalente envers son caractère protecteur — s'allonge et enfouit le micro dans un pli du tissu non loin de son ventre. Nous nous asseyons et écoutons le doux bruissement du tissu, une seconde peau, qui se soulève et s'abaisse au rythme de sa respiration. Rien de plus. Un paysage sonore émanant d'un micro-geste. Un monde est né. Nous vivons à l'intérieur du long moment, repos incomplet, confort partiel. Cela dure une vie.

Traduit de l'anglais par Catherine Delaruelle

1. « ...mais mes yeux voient encore », « Je rêvais du passé, et mon cœur battait vite, j'ai commencé à perdre le contrôle, j'ai commencé à perdre le contrôle... », extrait de la chanson *Jealous Guy* de John Lennon.

In Memory of Little Things

Adrian Heathfield

AT THE START she is lying back-facing in a tousled blonde wig, half-bare, a sheet simply draped from her waist down; she is a washed-up mermaid, twitching occasionally as if straining for air. Nothing much happens but this, and so I slowly slide into a micro-scale attention: the texture of her wig, synthetic against skin, the look of her back presented, the calm breath expanding in her lungs, her long spine, that freckled skin. And those small irregular spasms: like watching a loved one tumble into sleep, some part of their brain still fighting to remain conscious, jolting the body into momentary awakened states. This "entrance" and beginning insists on and states nothing except a thoroughly liminal being: there-not there, presented-withdrawn, bare-adorned, real-fake, alive-dead. The inaugural statement of La Ribot's *Panoramix*; as if all that will be shown or said, takes place in the wake of this quiet self-cancelling, this little gesture at the edge of life. A jolt of sleep. A fleeting awakening.

How *outside* the writer's language is in relation to the event; how lacking in that which would turn inside, make the thing flow and burn, touch and weigh again. How utterly significant, unique and unforgettable is the event. How lost it is now. All that one can do is proceed inside this tear, vibrate at the borders of memory. To write the event conscious of writing's internal failure, its mnemonic and ontological insecurity, but nonetheless invested in its impossible object. It is the annulment of the life of the event by time, and the belatedness of language itself, that makes the event's recall in writing vibrant and possible.

Fragment. Later. She is bare now and her walk quietly draws the audience across the space. She dons a cardboard sign that says "For sale" and slips into a fold-away wooden chair as if it were a dress. It's all low-key, understated, but not purposefully blank: she is simply very there, as much aware of us as we are of her. She is up against the wall, arm gently raised, a

hint of flamenco. Then the slow flap of the chair begins, opening and closing with an insistent wooden squeak. The chair rests around her middle, so the sexual suggestion is immediately present. The performance is an extended repetition of this simple action, gradually speeding up, her expression unchanging, but her body sliding down the wall in a long slow fall until she is flat and rattling the chair open and shut with a rapid mechanistic dispassion. Opening and closing. Opening and closing. Obscenity insinuated within emptiness. It is just the bald action; or it is a dance with castanets, a fuck on a squeaking bed, a gnashing of teeth, a hammering. There is something inevitable in the beat of the chair, cut against the quiet intelligence of her passivity. The act speaks of a subjection in opening. It is watchful.

La Ribot calls the long performance, of which this fragment is a part, *Panoramix*; a name that brings together two contradictory words. The relay of living within paradox is the signature of this work. *Panoramix* is a single durational work lasting around three and a half hours that brings together thirty-four much smaller works (*Piezas distinguidas*) some as short as a few minutes, all made over a period of ten years. It's a kind of life work, a re-collection of a dispersed series of events; a sewn together patchwork of pieces from discrete places and times. In naming the work, La Ribot marks her action of re-collection as a meaningful contradiction. A panorama is singular, whilst a mix is irrefutably plural. A panoramic view takes in all that it surveys without a break in visual continuity; it aspires to a comprehensive totality. A mix is a broken-up jumble of things, or else already a second, a repetition of a previous work, re-constituted or done differently. A panorama is edifying and bestows power on its recipient. A mix has no such coherence, clarity and integrity: it disrupts, confuses and sullies. Panoramas are seen from a distance, whereas it's easy to get mixed-up or lost in the mix of a mix.

I saw the whole of La Ribot's *Panoramix*, but I couldn't stay separate. Something about it turned me round and round, and so I am left with these unresolved senses and splinters of thought.

The site of the gallery is itself transformed into a makeshift place whose objects lack institutional veneration, but are full of personal charge. Clothes and accessories are stuck against the gallery walls with packing tape; like some temporary exhibit of remainders of a life sketched into place, too disqualified to be "properly" hung. Each object is functional but redundant here — trashy — but seems nonetheless to carry its own rich memory trace, its human history of use and re-use. Each object is particular, the result of an idiosyncratic choice, or so it seems in this context of displacement. And across the work, each object is subject to "inappropriate" use, to recycling, to testing through action and its relation to her flesh.

We become accustomed to the transformation of our attention. Her presence and the general conditions of subdued but extended exposure lead to a different economy of looking to those that we would normally find in either the gallery or the theatre. The traditional flow of grazing and glancing bodies through the gallery is held up: people seem to arrive with some such intention, then quickly fall prey to a transfixed waiting, mostly staying for prolonged periods, some unable to leave throughout the long duration. The looking is very inclusive, generous and dispersed; as if people are here not just to see, but to *be with* La Ribot. There is a feeling of over-seeing, of a secular vigil. The gallery is now a sea of looks of different durations, all of which this work has sanctioned: looking away, out or down, looking at the other

spectators, their looks, moves and responses. And in this openly social arena each of these looks knows that it is simultaneously being looked at. Then, of course, there is looking at La Ribot, who is bare and has opened herself to minute scrutiny. She looks back at you like you are really there; she sees you seeing her. This reciprocal gaze lacks the voyeurism of theatrical looking, where the static and privileged spectator peers from the dawkened auditorium at his mobile but chosen object caught in a scene of light. But here, we too are the subject of scrutiny. We are unable to separate ourselves from this encompassing scene of surveillance; unable to find a place of safety from which we could spy unseen and at will. In these utterly bare and open conditions of seeing, there are no revelations of previously unseen depths. Nothing is hidden behind these surfaces, waiting to be found. And yet showing and transformation still take place, as insistent, evacuated and ghostly forms. In this scene of ultra-exposure, it seems that scrutiny has lost its penetrative force; it is no longer associated with the revelation of truth or the discovery of an abiding presence. What we see is what we get.

Some time later. She is carefully laying out pieces of red cloth and clothing on the floor. Each red is a different shade. Clearly there is a logic to their relation as they are precisely placed, as if each object is personally implicated in some way in the scene it is coming to constitute. The whole thing starts to look like a big puddle of spilt blood. She is bare in bright green heels which suddenly appear even more incongruous in contrast with the plane of red in front of her. She puts on a scruffy blonde wig and attaches a pubic equivalent, then turns over on one heel so that she is off kilter, and takes a slow, slow fall until she is splayed across the floor. Her body is arched back, her face extinguished by the smudge of hair, the red river issuing, it seems, from between her legs. But in this event the body finds the blood. We stay for a long while in the grip of this image, watching the slow rise and fall of her breath inside this shattered feminine scene. It's a little like a kid's game of dress-up with its makeshift scenery and playing dead, but the game has gone seriously wrong. It's a little like Duchamp's *Etant donnés*, but domestic and less anonymous, less furtive, less mythic. It's more like a forensic still from a crime scene only very fake and very much alive. Perhaps I shouldn't think of it as an image at all: it's a feeling externalised, manifested in relation to objects and consequently re-lived. A life lived in the aftermath, bled out and empty, broken, dishevelled, but still interested in dissimulation, still breathing. The lyrics of a song are overlaid: "but my eyes still see," and a little later, "I was dreaming of the past, and my heart was beating fast, I began to lose control, I began to lose control ..." Always, in every image, utter intensity held at a distance.

At times like these, it is apparent that *Panoramix* is a work of memory, but not simply in the sense that all performance is memory work: the physical reiteration of previously enacted acts, or "twice behaved behaviour." What I mean by this is that *Panoramix* makes evident the human labour of remembering — the utterly necessary but always failing attempt to re-stage the past in the present — and by this re-staging lays bare the hopeless aspiration of being at one with time.

La Ribot's dance takes place, like the dances of her contemporaries Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Goat Island and Jonathan Burrows, at a new intersection of performance practice. The previous generation of experimental choreographers from the dance-theatre of Pina Bausch through to the physical theatre of Lloyd Newson and DV8, took the structures and forms of theatrical practice as a vital source of an interdisciplinary leap. In the hyper-connective context of contemporary culture, cross art-form practice, including the work of movement artists,

is now much more promiscuous, ambitious, intensive and eclectic in its affiliations and borrowings. La Ribot's *œuvre* quietly exemplifies something of this openness, whilst focusing its extension towards traditions of performance art within a visual arts frame. The work draws on the aesthetics of conceptual and minimalist art, emphasises action in "real" space and time, and is often located within galleries and complemented by aspects of installation. But despite its appearances, its un-dance-like qualities, I want to hold on to this link with older choreographic practices. This is not simply because La Ribot's identity is undeniably marked by her history as a dancer; but because the question of this lineage opens up some vital thoughts on the nature of her work and its aesthetic and cultural significance; perhaps even on the nature of movement itself within the contemporary.

Bausch's response to the empty formalism of the dance against which she turned was to assert through dance the drive to move. The inaugural question of this work was not how does the body move, but why? Dance-theatre went in search of the drives of physical expression, and against the context of the personal and sexual politics of the nineteen-eighties and nineties, found its *métier* as an embodied language of desire. Its aesthetics re-asserted the performer's personal history and identity as an indispensable *content*, exploded the repressive postures of grace and poise, overturned hierarchies of power in role and relation, stretched the performer's body and the audience's nerves through highly energised risk-taking, and generously liberated meaning through a sensual poetry. Physical expression was privileged above the verbal in these moves and the body *in extremis* became dance and physical-theatre's primary instrument and site of relational and cultural critique. The work pressed hard against psychic and physical limits, finding insights and new means of articulating the dynamics of gender, sex and sexuality in human relations. Ecstasy and agony were often intertwined in this work as a means to relay the personal and cultural resonances of the interdependence of presence and absence, masculinity and femininity, sex and death, attainment and loss. As such, dance-theatre and physical theatre articulated a certain wounding in the nature of sexual (and social) relation. Positioning the performing body as the primary means through which to access and articulate this wounding, they also offered it up as a vital means of possible cure or at least resistance, through the exertion of movement itself. Perhaps this is why the repetition of falling became such a dominant figuration in the choreography of dance-theatre: trusting in relation, in the will and flesh of others, dance-theatre's emblematic body fell again and again, subject to the violent disregard of the other. The other couldn't catch that fall.

La Ribot's work is intensely conscious of this heritage and its conceptual arrangements, but articulates them somewhat differently. For here the theatrical frame is replaced by the round of gallery spectatorship; the frontal cedes to panoramic exposure, and the binary division of the performer-spectator relation is dispersed. The spectator is liberated from a static place by the choice and fluidity of promenade. This aesthetic side-step of the theatrical plane deftly brings the spectator into a field of social and sensory engagement without need for the energised railing against the cleavage of the proscenium, which was so much a part of dance-theatre's and physical theatre's agitated aesthetics. La Ribot's persona and her drive to move is also highly present in relation to both the work's content and its form. However, the work eschews physical theatre's high-impact viscerality and the forceful assertion of the self in favour of a quieter, though nonetheless edgy, being. Its terrain is the place where dance dissolves into

action, the movement of stillness and the exposed materiality of the flesh. This too is work in which limits are tested, but the boundaries in question are those of the performing subject herself: her somatic, emotional, and psychological constitution of her self. In common with the works of Bausch, La Ribot focuses on the relation between the female body, memory and time. But as solo performances, La Ribot's works fix less on the wound in relation and more on the wound at the centre of the experience of embodied subjectivity itself. She traces the phenomenological inability of her body to ever constitute itself as a body with solid boundaries and integrity. Relation here is between the self and its own lived-memory, between the self and the social body that it meets in its performances. Always re-staging singular acts of self-constitution, La Ribot enacts the wound of time in consciousness that renders its foundational experiences simultaneously constitutive and lost. In this meditation on the relation between time and a particular lived body, what makes and defines movement is insistently questioned.

Another fragment: she corners herself, bare again, and stands on a fold-away chair back against a wall. She bends double so that she is upside down, folded like the chair should be when put away. Her image is all back. She has taken a microphone, and it slowly becomes apparent that she is sobbing into this mic, quietly but insistently. After all her exposure, the strange paradox of presentation and refusal, image but no image, voicing but no words said. This is intensely raw and private, pressed out into the public sphere and then simultaneously withdrawn. I see now her affinity with the fold-away, the least visible of chairs, an object like La Ribot of extension and retraction. I listen to the amplified sound of small sobs. They come from a far away place that is also right here in the room. They reverberate through the blank image and into me. As if to access grief requires a turning over, a bending double, an erasure of one's very profile. As if this condition of semi-present grief, of the female body given to be seen as that which cannot be, is the condition that underlies this work. As if to assert that in all these plays of memory, these intensely emotional but calm renditions of feeling manifested in image and in action, there is a place of being/feeling that remains stowed away, unrepresentable in this arena, steadfastly out of sight.

The original *Piezas distinguidas* were each sold to a distinguished proprietor in a gesture that mimicked the systems of patronage and ownership in the art market. What could ownership mean in the context of performance, where the work is repeatable but cannot be exactly reproduced, or easily subjected to a capitalist system of exchange? The gesture asks this question, apparently fulfilling the terms of entry into the market, whilst at the same time hollering them out. *Panaromix* is another kind of circulation of these works: the sense of each distinguished piece's dedication to some other is the residue of this gesture; but these works are now re-cast as unreturnable gifts to the gathered audience.

Though she spends much of the performance without clothes or barely dressed, La Ribot is not nude. Nudity is a kind of wearing of the skin as a sign of the revealed self; it is swathed in eroticism and projections of gender. Naked might seem like a better word to describe her condition, but even that seems too much like a proclamation; there is no definitive statement here in this stripping of the cloaks of culture. More accurately, the state to which she constantly returns is that of *bareness*. She is simply bare: unassuming, at ease in her own skin, knowing but not arch. She is just breathing, moving, seeing. The kind of blank bareness that is unresponsive to erotic projection, intimate but impersonal, saying very little in and of itself, but allowing actions and objects to speak in relation to it. Though each action in this work

involves the wearing of clothes, this is not the donning of costume, in fact, it barely constitutes dressing: clothes and accessories are placed as objects against and over the context of her skin. Their incongruity, their claim to meaning and their ownership of her body, is exposed. Perhaps this is why, though she has spent the performance wearing and discarding numerous clothes, I cannot say that she has undressed, since there is no excitement of revelation, no unveiling. The skin she lives in in this work is, of course, a female skin; and like all skins it is not exempt from the ideologies of the cultural gaze. But her laying bare of this skin, its total giving over of itself, enables its use as a site where we might see more clearly, aside from our habitual ways of seeing, the relation between a phenomenological body and its becoming object, its cultural, mnemonic and ideological makeover.

Another fragment: she is drinking from a bottle, one litre of water, her head and the bottle cocked back as if for show. Nothing moves but the slow rhythmic contractions of her throat as she passes the water into her body without pause. The relay of eyes around her. The level is slowly sinking: water is disappearing into her. As she drinks, her posture gradually changes. She loses tension and the vertical, and starts to slump towards the floor. It is a very matter-of-fact image, like a conjuring trick with its mechanism of illusion exposed. In its long duration, exactly timed to the length of an accompanying song, many possible resonances flit across the simple gesture, threatening but failing to stick. There is something of the masculine drinking game here, something of the scientific test; and aside the sense of tricks and measures, a feeling of enforcement and torture, of masochism, of deprivation and quenching, and of greed. Or perhaps it is just about the meeting of one kind of matter with another: the action of one on the other. Fluid enters her and she is taken by weight and by gravity.

Most of all, this emptiness, which is not at all empty, this stillness that still moves, this condition of waiting, is a kind of care for that which is imminent. It may come to us in the event, take shape and become meaning; it may recede and resist our presumptuous attempts to know it; it may remain elusive, tantalising and unspoken; it may just stay imminent and never materialise. But what is certain is that the conditions of attention that this performance sets down are carefully attuned to its movement. The performance respects the imminent.

Of all the paradoxes that La Ribot's work inhabits, its contradictory arrangement of time is its most haunting and emotional charge. *Panoramix* enacts a mutation of our habitual perception of time. Estranged from the normal times of performance scheduling, the individual works that make up *Panoramix* seem too fragmentary and slight to be a performance proper, whilst the grand work they come to constitute seems too long to be comfortably sustained. In this combination of the too short and the too long, La Ribot signals to her spectators that they are in the grip of an impossible temporality — fleeting and enduring — a time that does not have its own time. As the spectator enters the dense and slow moving sensorium of this work, orthodox clock time slides into the immeasurable fields of sensory time. Things take their time, and time itself becomes a product of bodies and senses and perceptions, rather than an imposed external structure. This time as it is experienced is not the progressive accumulative time of culture, but a time that is always divided and subject to different flows and speeds. Time out of time. The spectator becomes the witness.

But what is it that she is waiting for when, in one of those thousands of moments, she turns to look out, stalls to think, or glides across the space deep inside some ineffable thought? She is waiting for the event to have happened, for the time of the action-image to have taken place. She waits for these things because she knows that they exceed her. She is the event's catalyst but she is also its perpetually displaced centre.

The generosity of this work, its minimal aesthetics and exposure of action and relation as choreographic, leads its spectators to be seen as performers too. It seems somehow that the woman in the second performance of *Panoramix* I see in Geneva, who insists on quietly reading a book during a section of the work, is doubling La Ribot's assertions of an absent presence, her insistent highly visible refusal to watch, perfectly amplifying the subject of the work. Though it is a mild evening, the guy who comes to the gallery with his shirt off, and lumbers around unaware of his incongruity, his grand beer-belly in a strange conversation with La Ribot's bareness. The perfect timing of a couple of young lovers who affectionately lie down in an unknowing but exact unison with a slow La Ribot fall. Another thousand fragments of tiny gestures, looks, relations that are suddenly announced as presentation, as meaningfully anomalous, as deserving of scrutiny in the light of her aesthetic conditioning. Echoes and insertions of performance in the social sphere.

So many images hewn from trauma, so peacefully arranged.

What recurs across this long and expansive work? Certain figurations and figures. A restless, searching vision. The measuring of a female body, its binding, and its becoming object. The circulation and mnemonic life of objects in its sensory field. The imperative for this body to be shown and the impossibility of its full presence. The lilt of a lopsided broken-heeled woman. The inhabitation through duration of the slow, slow fall of this body. Our living with this body. Its stillness that is nonetheless movement. And throughout it all: the calm persistence of a life, there, bare, before us.

Near the end. She is opening a foil blanket; the ones that marathon runners use when they cross the line. After endurance, warmth, offered from the flimsiest of objects. It is golden and very thin. She wraps it around herself badly — ambivalent towards its protection — lies down and presses a microphone into the fold of material about her belly. We sit and listen to the quiet rustle of the fabric, a second skin, stretching and retracting to match her scarce breath. Nothing more. A soundscape emanating from a micro-gesture. A world is born. We are living inside the long moment of incomplete rest and partial comfort. It lasts a lifetime.