

*Just in Time -
'Momentary' Events in the Making of Rosemary Butcher's Signature
Practices*

Despite the popularity of the notion of 'ephemerality' in certain performance studies writers, the notion of time and of *time lost* is actually proper to a temporally-limited *spectator* engagement with performance, rather than to that of the different expert practitioners involved in performance-making, for whom 'the work' has never been ephemeral. It is, on the contrary, *work*, which takes its time, struggles with 'resistant materialities', and leaves its marks. It follows that the performance event itself (when spectating occurs) is non-identical with the processes, challenges, enquiries and discoveries that are constitutive of expert practitioners' engagement. Not only that, but that those same processes, challenges, enquiries and discoveries are temporally-marked, and, on this basis, internally-differentiated. While for an expert performance practitioner 'the work' seems to emerge *just in time* – there is normally a deadline (fine word, that!) – we argue in this paper that what emerges tends to be at once unexpected, often surprising to its maker, *and* 'worked through'.

It is 'worked through', it is by definition 'new', and it emerges *just in time* – a combination that seems to us to signal a particular sort of expertise, threaded through with despair, hope, and tenacity – and the knowledge that *it has worked*, in the past - in the creative practitioner. Her expertise is significantly a matter of time; it can be identified, in the making, by her growing grasp of *the work as work*, and then, progressively, of *the work that finishes the work* – even though it can only finish it momentarily, and, to the maker, always inadequately.

She finishes it *just enough* to allow that expert practitioner to step away, to call it 'it', which means that 'the work' has achieved a quasi-independent identity, and can be taken up by others, upon which that expert practitioner leaves what others will confirm to be her signature mark or *impress*. What a spectator recognises as the 'signature practices' of the named expert practitioner, in the event, tend only to be recognised by her retrospectively, although her relationship with them is different – they appear to her in their fragility and their compromises, as a momentary instantiation of an ongoing enquiry, and not as 'the work itself'. It is not yet 'the

work itself'; it emerges just in time, with a hint of desperation as a work *not yet done*, not yet done *well enough*, yet *enough done* to be let go, for the sake of a deadline. 'The work' of the expert practitioner, in other words, is serial, eternally incomplete, rather than single-event-bound.

The 'working towards' the deadline, constituting a public performance outcome, being 'time-framed' and largely pre-determined by conventions specific to performance times with according expectations on behalf of the spectatorship, involves processes of 'working through' the material already created, and a processing thereof into the performance work to be presented. Jean-François Lyotard's notion of 'perlaboration'¹, taken from a Freudian context and the German term *Durcharbeitung*, describes a 'working through' of material, which crucially is a time-specific and time-dependent process. Just as crucially as far as Butcher's work is concerned, that working through entails a recognisable method, but it can't be pre-ordered or programmed. The working through of ideas and materials is, following Lyotard, perpetual, a 'never-ending work'. Butcher shows us this 'working through' *in the event*, as distinct from showing her or their reflection on it: she shows us the separate engagement of each with a shared past. They are sisters but the working through of each is scored individually, by the performer, and examined in the present moment of performance. She shows us someone engaged in and looking at something, twice over, in such a way that we see them in actional terms, rather more than we "see them". In Butcher's terms, her own recall of performance work, since the 1970s, has its impact on her present creative decision-making, and the emerging work, in apparent contradiction, is always given (it 'fits with' disciplinary parameters) but equally always new. She is curious: she intervenes *in the disciplinary tradition*, from ever-changing perspectives. The work is both recognisable, characterised by the impress of signature, and new.

In a recent rehearsal process, for Butcher's more recent *After Kaprow – The Silent Room* performed at *The Place* in London in November 2012, the expectation to fulfil criteria relating to the public performance *event* presented a challenge to the choreographer, who always felt that she was 'running out of time'. The material created with dancers Ana Mira and Rosalie Wahlfrid until this moment constituted

¹ Lyotard, "L'obédience" in: *L'Inhumain: Causeries sur le temps*, Galilée, 1988, pp.177-192.

short sequences of movement, and it was the pressure of the performance event being close that forced and brought about a decision-making process concerning how the live event, which included a film projection, would be 'put together'. This is what we mean in using the expression "Just in time": "just" – as in justice and judgement in artmaking - and "just in time", because time seemed to be running out.

In *After Kaprow* Butcher engaged in an inquiry into composition itself, in an active searching for *ways of assembling*, or "accumulating" (in her own words), the movement material created by the two dancers and for possible "devices" that needed to be "applied" as part of this *working through* of the material. In this particular moment of the rehearsal process Butcher saw two possible solutions: 1) "not to deal with time" which meant to present, over a larger time span, three-minute sequences that "don't go anywhere", or 2), which she called more "extreme": to keep two separate elements (not to interweave the two performers' material). The latter speculation, in terms of compositional strategies, was perceived by Butcher as not fulfilling the criteria set by the expectations of spectatorship: she felt "people wouldn't get their money's worth", and that this decision would only have been made due to a 'lack of time' on her part.

It is the availability of 'time' for the expert practitioner, largely contingent upon a given budget, that impacts on the decision-making processes in the making of the work. Arriving at the deadline, which describes a momentary culmination of a creative process, 'ending' in the presentation of a performance outcome, might however not correspond to the work that might have emerged if the (**illusory**) 'time needed' had been available (although it is never available). The still-prevailing notion that '*in time*' the work could be 'better', tends to drive practitioners on to create another work, a different working through, that suggests that the present enquiry has not yet been exhausted.

When Lyotard refers to the technical or technicity of a work of art, which is constitutive to it, the notion of technicity relates to the way a composer 'works [material] through'. The work of art, while remaining enigmatic, does offer a determinable figure in discipline-specific terms. It is, in expert hands, both rational, abstract, and 'new'.

Reflecting in 2005 on her most recent work in Dublin (for Liz and Jenny Roche, *Six Frames: Memories of Two Women*) Butcher recalls:

Looking and identifying within memory, and then physicalising the memory, and then going back into the idea again....The question [had begun] to fascinate me: how would two sisters remember their childhood? ...They [worked with] that idea of looking at things that happened, that affected them, in their own lives, and each made a notated script independently of each other, with drawings or a word or two. We went together to the Jasper Johns exhibition ...at the Dublin Museum of Modern Art. He was showing autobiographical work, and there were thirteen frames. [The dancers researched] their own memories, as material to bring to the making process. They then made a score each, of thirteen pictures, from which we extracted seven frames, of seven minutes each – forty-nine minutes.

I timed them, and filmed them. They had to read what they had written as notation, not as ...memory. ...It [was] as though they were seeing, through the notation, something with which they [differently] connected in their childhood. It is like an impulse score that each had produced, and the performance is never the same, from one day to the next, but where it comes from is the same, I added in, to their memory and to their [philosophical and strategic] understanding, things that might give it some tempo – they had to state something [silently], and then counteract it...The structure that I laid upon what they already had allowed it to be once more removed, slightly, from what had been a personal memory. ...[W]hen I look at the rushes, I also know that I am not aware of what they are looking at[which] is actually irrelevant because they show no reaction. I am looking at someone looking, over time, at something that holds her.

Our argument here is likely to be unpopular with certain listeners or readers: it is that the complex ongoing and internally differentiated *processes* of performance-making crucially remain invisible and unknowable *as such* to spectating, that, *in the event*, tends only to see their outcome, which is always a compromise with the logics of production specific to the discipline – for example, to choreography, expertly done, in a performance venue. What this means for us is that as performance researchers concerned with attempting to grasp and to account for at least some of the ‘knowledge-processes’ (or epistemic processes) that are specific to creative decision-making in performance, we need to be present and engaged *before the event*, in the event, and after it.

Rosemary Butcher’s performance-making processes, as we see above, are internally-differentiated and time-sensitive, and they produce work that is impressed with a recognisable signature – or signature practices – recognised by others and by the practitioner herself retrospectively. It needs, in the name of research, to be reviewed,

by whatever means are available, and viewed again. It is retrospectively that we recognise the making processes as decisive, significant. We have to learn to recognise them, and in doing so we look back at them, in recent memory, and see them differently.

We suggest that these making practices can be taken as *processually representative* of those of a wide range of practitioners, who crucially 'devise' or 'experimentally conceive' their work, however different the actual processes of one or another expert practitioner, as well as the performance outcome. Such processes, in Brian Massumi's terms (2002), entail an inherent sense of 'futurity' – the work always *will emerge* and foresees its own (hence our own) future - threaded through with 'something' complex, delicate and heterogeneous that we might still have to call 'memory', despite the fact that the noun itself misrepresents what is actually an ongoing and eternally incomplete *work of re-call*. It is the skilful weaving of these two, with a performance outcome in mind, that triggers the expert-intuitive processes which operate, crucially, according to a double and internally contradictory logic of *working something through*: 'sensed' but 'unforeseeable' before the actual moments of emergence (Bergson 1946/2007), surprising but often pleasing, to the expert practitioner herself, and modulated, progressively, in terms of the logics of production, which will be *folded back*, with a certain severity, *onto* the emergent *stuff*.

The notion of time, and of highly-differentiated times, in other words, the immutable and the immanent, the internally-differentiated, the solitary experience and the shared, engage with particular ways of seeing, so as to produce *what will be* experienced as 'signature practices', in expert performance-making registers. Their event, in these terms, to the expert practitioner, is no more - and no less - than a 'momentary instantiation' (Knorr Cetina, 2001): the timely performance outcome that seems initially to end the enquiry, but that will reveal, to the practitioner concerned, a further set of questions, to be re-engaged, and to be worked through, once again, and differently.