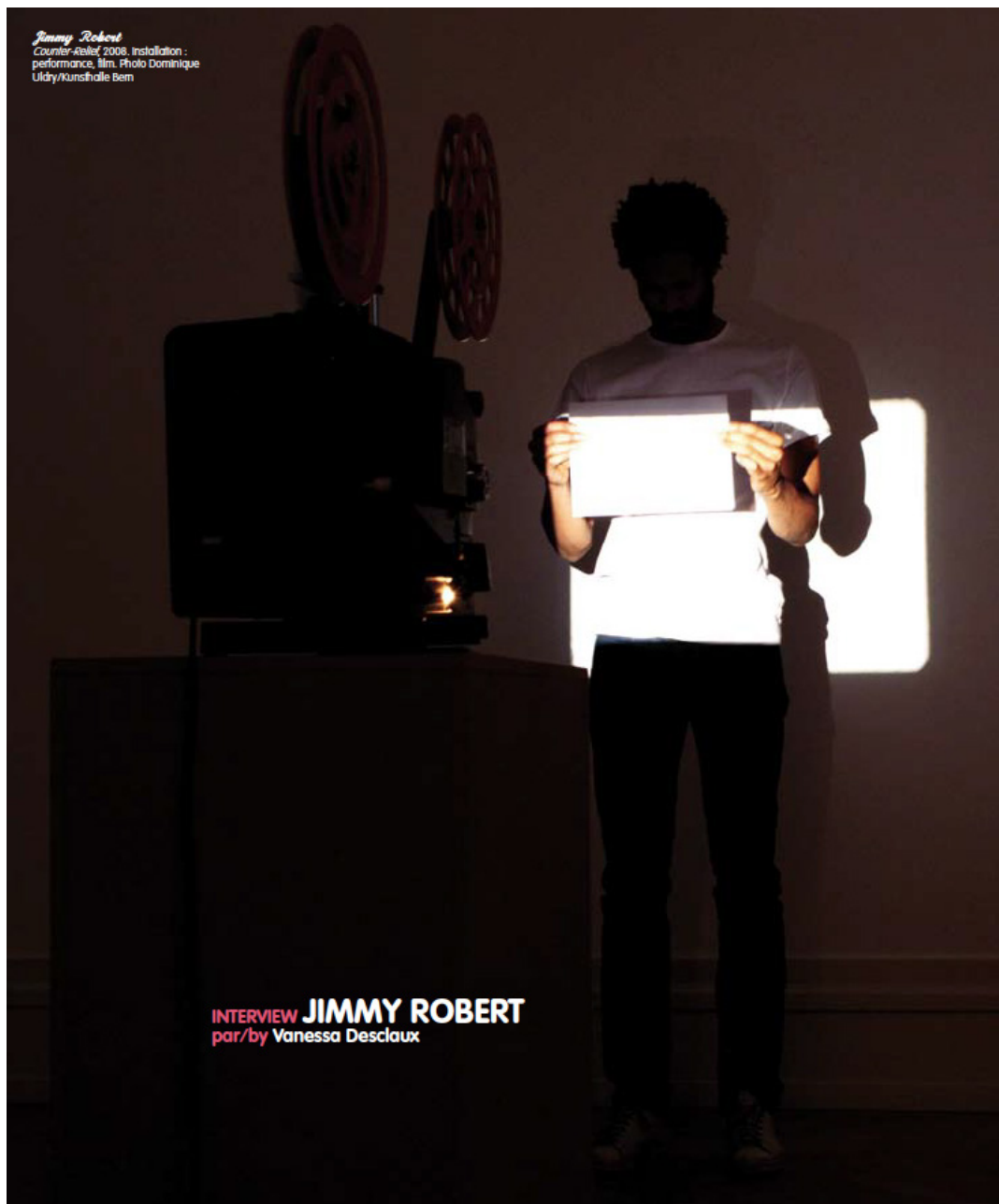


Tanya Leighton

Jimmy Robert

ÉLARGIR LES IMAGES, MATÉRIALISER LA LECTURE, HABITER LE LANGAGE
EXPAND IMAGES, MATERIALIZE READING, LIVE IN LANGUAGE

par/by Vanessa Desclaux



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Vanessa Desclaux. In his preface to Michel Foucault's *Raymond Roussel*, Pierre Machery writes that "*language is not an instrument adapted to the hand of man, but a space to live in, a site whose non-objective reality is revealed through the 'experiences' of literature.*" Would you say that this idea of "living" in language corresponds to you?

Jimmy Robert. This interview has made me tense on many levels, this necessity of returning to language in order to define a practice that highlights a lack of thereof—too little, or not enough—and the dread of authority that accompanies an apprehension of such conceptions.

Here, we are speaking about language and subjectivity. Consequently, we arrive at a field of interpretation that is very vast, but whose entranceway remains generous and inclusive. I am thinking of Oscar Wilde ("*There are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it*"), a kind of impasse on the level of communication and representation arising out of a desire for the impossible—philosophical Aporia, in short. I am also thinking of Virginia Woolf and the way she crystallizes feminine subjectivity, "living" language through the creation of a resolutely modern polyphony. Toss out the directions and you will find your way.

I have more of an affinity for literature, because I think there is a rupture between the discourse on art (theory), overly conscious of its own aesthetics, and art itself. This relationship is simultaneously a conflict and a seducing act to the

extent that we feel obliged to take a stand and explain it, to stop being just another "overly literary" French artist. So actually, occupying language, assimilating other forms to create one's own discourse, is one of many strategies we can use to affirm the existence of the individual subject. The question that remains is whether this individuality is real, and to what extent it enters into the system of valorization belonging to a given plastic language.

VD. Your works exist between the surface of the wall and the dimensions of the space, creating an infinity of folds, a sensation of constant movement. Can you tell me about the way you physically lay claim to an exhibition space? Do you project the movements of the visitor's body onto the space at hand?

JR. My pieces, like the spectators themselves, live for an instant the space where we encounter them. Our experience of them is different each time, like the juxtaposition of images at that same moment. I feel it is important, therefore, to orchestrate the arrangement and movement of visitors. To the extent that the images attempt to make contact with the body, the space the body occupies must be itself be granted special importance. This infinite mirror relation between the subject and the object establishes a kind of dynamism, a dialogue that we encounter once more in the performances where I use film in a direct relation with the body (for example, the performances "object/my affection" and "counter-relief.") I am looking to expand the image field, to question the distance that it inher-

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to question the distance that it inherently imposes upon us. The question remains: who is in the foreground, the observer or the observed?

VD. In an interview you did recently with the Italian magazine *Mousse*, you were asked about the white page as a leitmotif in your work. Your response locates this white page in a dialogue between reading and writing. There seems to be something rather somber and alarming in the symbolism of this empty page: the inexorable absence that it expresses, and the erasure of memory that it makes visible. Are there other formal elements in your work that help you construct this tension between desire and alienation?

In *Painful Singularities*, the publication I realized in 2008, two events figure in the same frame. The crumpling of the text, side by side with the text and the images themselves, gives rise to a materialization of reading. This is a bit like in baroque music, where there seems to be a correlation between musical form and the way a text is sung; an echo in the music's structure (ornaments that are decorative but not gratuitous, a coloratura, for example), not to mention the very precise gestures in the instrumental accompaniment, give rise to kind of a choreography, underscoring each image that is evoked. These elements shed light on the limits of language and the despair the body experiences as it attempts to overcome this limit.

VD. Do you still look to your body, your experiences, and your emotions as the starting point for your pieces? Would you say that the gestures, ob-

jects, images, and texts that comprise your work—alternately, produced, found, and “lightly manipulated”—are still anchored in a relationship with the other?

JR. I am still concerned with the relation to other, to the absent figure, to the public. I do not try to reveal this through personal elements, however, but to transcend this dimension; even if my work touches upon something very intimate, I cannot speak for everybody else, or interpret their views. A shift from one viewpoint to the next must occur progressively, avoiding confrontation. One cannot force someone to see what he doesn't see himself without changing their view of things, whatever that may be; therefore, I think that one shouldn't present one's self as an authority. The title of my exhibition at the CAC Brétigny, *légèrement manipulés* (“lightly manipulated”), refers as much to objects as it does to those who look at them; the movement is not univocal. I try to take stock of the gaze.

VD. You explain that your works set up a tension between two different types of narratives: the narrative of content and that of form. Is this “intertextuality”—which you associate with certain literary forms, and particularly with the *nouveau roman*—still relevant for you in terms of the multiple potential readings of your work, ranging from the social and the political to the poetic and intimate?

JR. I think that one can live inside a formal illusion devoid of relations to the exterior world, but doing so means lying to one's self. All of our

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actions are political and have social value: the materials we choose, the way we work, and our subjects, be they intimate and private or references firmly anchored in the history of art. I do not necessarily assume a distinct position, but I am not a completely passive actor, either.

The *Un-Scene* performance I did in Wiels, and which will soon recreate at Antidote, is an example where I put two Belgian friends of mine up on a platform next to an image. One recites a text that he will later go on to sing, as the other draws abstract forms in charcoal. The text is a juxtaposition of titles from various political songs; the new formations that arise are occasionally humorous, flirting with nonsense and poetry and allowing for novel readings. The idea here is to establish a stage, a theater, where one performs the process of self-representation. I play with the English term "Un-Scene" which, in the gay community, means "non-

Jimmy Robert
Sans titre, 2006 (détail). Jet d'encre sur papier Arche, ruban rose, médium/
Inkjet on Arche paper, pink ribbon, MDF. 92 x 140 cm

milieu," and consequently, "performing heteronormativity." I approach the gay scene as a theater and try to see if it holds some form of visual justice. I reconnect the idea of representation with that of a political act: one that might seem ridiculous in a very formal arrangement, but which nonetheless doesn't prevent us from asking questions about the political (or non-political) nature of such arrangements. Who is speaking? And who is speaking for whom? To forget these questions while looking at my work would be to omit a very large part of it.

VD. This question, "Who is talking?" is particularly interesting in literary fiction when the author, the narrator, and the characters are not one and the same person, or at least do not represent the same voice. When you performed Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*

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with Ian White in 2003, at the Tate Britain, then again in 2009 at the MOMA in New York, did you feel like you were occupying an artistic fiction that wasn't yours? That you were speaking for someone else?

J.R. No, when I dance *Trio A*, I am only dancing *Trio A*. I execute the exact choreography that I learned from Pat Catterson, one of the choreographers Yvonne Rainer authorized to teach it. There is no fiction, nor character; I am completely in the action, like a dancer who would have been asked to dance *Trio A*. Obviously, I am not a dancer, but this piece is accessible to everyone, and was designed by Rainer to be

democratic. And that is what makes it so interesting, even if it is difficult to learn. I think I can say that one does not lose one's individuality while performing it—for this expresses itself precisely through our capacity to execute the dance-- but that particular performance was not about my interpretation of *Trio A*; it was about Yvonne Rainer's piece. In this instance, I think of myself as an object. I convey nothing personal apart from the desire to dance as a non-dancer. The learning process proved to be a real experiment in the way the body occupies space, with its folds and re-folds recalling the images I construct—an experience that is minimal and sculptural, but physical.



Jimmy Robert
Trio A by Yvonne Rainer. Collaboration
Ian White et/and Pat Catterson
Photo Yi-chun Wu / The Museum of
Modern art, New York



Jimmy Robert
Premier plan: *Sans titre*, 2007. Jet
d'encre sur papier Arche, carte postale
John Singer Sargent, « Lady Agnew of
Lochnaw » (1835–1932), papiers, mé-
dium, tableaux/Inkjet on Arche paper,
postcard John Singer Sargent, « Lady
Agnew of Lochnaw » (1835–1932),
papiers, MDF, fresles, 75 x 47 cm.
Arrière-plan: *Sans titre*, 2006.
Technique mixte. Jet d'encre sur papier
Arche, gafler/Inkjet on Arche paper,
scotch, 67 x 63 cm, *Sans titre*, 2006.
Feuille de placage/Backing Veneer: 29
x 20 cm. Dessin mural, 2008. Fusain/
Charcoal

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