



*femmeusesaction #19,
final/ment/seule*

Cécile Proust



www.femmeuses.org

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Over the past years Cecile Proust has been questioning the place of women in art and our society as the coding of bodies and genders.

In addition to her work as a dancer for contemporary choreographers such as Odile Duboc, Alain Buffard, Daniel Larrieu, Robert Wilson, Albrecht Knust's Quatuor, she travelled to various countries to further her training including : flamenco in Spain, kathak in North India, oriental dance in Egyptia, Jiuta Maï (geishas traditionnal dance) in Kyoto. Thanks to this fusion of training, crossed with occidental contemporary dance, with theoretical thoughts, and with critical texts, she questions the construction of body, the fabrication/making of gender, and steriotypical gender roles.

In the past few years Cecile Proust's work has been influenced by questions rooted in personal, artistic and political history. When chosen to participate in one of the fair wheels for the millenium eve at the Champs-Élysées in Paris, she created in collaboration with Jacques Hoepffner, a choreographic video questionning the gestures of women and their political engagement.

In 2002 she created *Alors heureuse ?* a complex work which questions sexuality from the perspective of women. In 2004, after having met Beatriz Preciado in the Dance Department of Paris 8 University, Cécile Proust constructed *femmeuses*, in which she radically dives into these questions.

This ambitious and multi-faced project is both artistic and theoretical. It grows from interactions between feminist, post colonial, queer thoughts and art postmodernity. It focuses on the link between theory and the fine arts encompassing dance and performance.

Numerous arts forms and movements are linked with questions directed towards social and political movements following the Vietnam war contestation and the second wave of feminism and the rising of political movements in most occidental countries: such as pop art, Judson Church artists, conceptual art, minimalism, body art, experimental cinema, photography.



These artistic and political movements crossed, have influenced and enriched each other.

These artistic choices were also linked with the birth of a new research field, feminist studies, introduced in 1970 by artists Judy Chicago and Myriam Shapiro at American universities. A few years later were founded gender studies, postcolonial studies, queer studies, all of which show that these thoughts are still in progress.

Nowadays it's a point well made that women are not the only subject of feminism: by founding a criticism of sexual order, feminism questions about the production of gender, class, race, and sexuality differences. Those theories are also helpful to analyse authority and domination systems, further than the gender one.

What Cecile Proust brings to practice with *femmeuses*, is articulated around two axes:

- Historical and theoretical research fed by past art works, critical texts, artist's videos, movies, interviews, iconographic documents
- Artistic creation through *femmeusesactions*

Since 2004, this project gathered artists and theoreticians. 19 different performances *femmeusesactions* took place through several forms: performances, videos, website, installations, programming of performances... *femmeuses* is welcomed by some French national choreographical centers (CCN Montpellier, CCNRB Rennes, CNDC Angers), at the French pavillon at the Architecture Biennale of Venice, and shown in tours in France and abroad

Cécile Proust is regularly invited in art schools, art centers, and was invited artist at the Parc Saint Léger-centre d'art contemporain de Pougues-les-Eaux during two years. After this two years residency, she became exhibition co-organiser with Danièle Yvergnaux for *femmeusesaction #15, the exhibition*. She benefits from the help of "choreographical writings", and has won the Villa Medicis prize "hors les murs" which allows her to work in the USA (New York and San Francisco).

In 2007 she was in research residency at the Centre National de la Danse. She wrote for the mediatheque, interviewed choreographers, gave workshops about gender related studies at Seine Saint Denis. The residency ended with the solo creation *femmeusesaction 19, final/ment/seule*.



femmeusesaction #19, fnal/ment/seule is stuffed with marks and references, and is also funny and generous. A performance which will induce intellectually by laughing. A mix of learning and humor. A revue-leader feminist?

INSTALLATION, PERFORMANCE, DEBATE one project, three possible declinations

AN INSTALLATION which turns into a scenography, or a scenography conceived as an installation...

femmeuses #19 fnal/ment/seule the scenography is conceived with the collaboration of her accomplice Jacques Hoepffner. This installation can exist by itself during the day, before being turned into performance during the night. In other words, the public can visit and walk through the scenery before performance time.

The design has been made to show and to hear certain process of transmission through art form devices. It is complementary with the performance and is the resonance of a fundamental historical and social part taking in *femmeuses*. This installation is a more evolved version of the exposition that was presented in the Saint Leger Park/contemporary art centre, in 2006. The visual and audio devices that are exhibited are organised around the multiple sources that have nourished the creation of *femmeuses*. This installation is made of 10 monitors showing historical, political and artistic movements, which are:

Not for sale by Laura Cottingham, *FHAR* by Carole Roussopoulos, *So Help me Hannah* by Hannah Wilke. Several *femmeuses* creations confront themselves with works of artists such as the canadian Dayna Mac Load, or the Japanese Takako Yabuki, which question the same problematic through extremely different aesthetics. *femmeuses #15, l'exposition* model is a DVD of interviews with the concerned artists. A part of the documentation room is also integrated to this exhibition.

THE PERFORMANCE, *femmeusesaction#19, fnal/ment/seule*, is the prologue of a postface. It is personal, and thus very political, funny but extremely sharp, feminist and sexual, precise and documented, but sometimes blurry and full of bad faith. A simile lesbian that sleeps with men, more precisely, with one man; Cecile Proust uses



everything but the kitchen sink. She is alone, but in good company, perhaps naked, but nevertheless wearing the trousers. Between the self portrait and the pamphlet, this intimate manifesto carries the word of many voices. It can strike you the way the furs lies, or rub you up the wrong way, even make you cringe. It is smooth and silky, but sometimes raging the way it evocates the violence women suffer from, and there rights which are still to be taken. Impatient and unachieved, this performance questions the expectations and elaboration of such a project. It is singular, and therefore universal. Anyway, something impossible.

THE DEBATE After the performance members of the audience are invited to go through the installation which was previously used as a scenography, to watch the videos, the DVD, and to listen to the sound work of Jacques Hoëpffner *femmeuses #14, écoute*. In order to comprehend the multiplicity of the sources and creations of *femmeuses*, a discussion is proposed with the audience : a debate about the performance, the documents shown during the installation, and problematic that rises around the subject. It will be led by Cecile Proust, Jacques Hoëpffner, and Elisabeth Lebovici (art historian, journalist, and co writer with Catherine Gonnand of the book *femmes artistes/artistes femmes* that came out in 2006 at the éditions Hazan).

In addition, Cecile Proust proposes pedagogical workshops conceived as both practical and theoretical *femmeuses* sessions. Documentation by request.





Judith Butler *Gender Trouble*: simply thrown on the floor. *Le Manifeste contrasexuel* of Beatriz Preciado, chucked away through the air. Etc

In *femmeusesaction # 19*, Cécile Proust repeats this slightly casual movement, and swiftly abandons theoretical references as soon as mentioned. She desecrates book as an object. She opens those books, draws from them, makes a public cause of. But she doesn't turn, order, classify, pile them. She is just indicating where she feeds her thought from. But her action overflows this source, refuses to channel it. Where she's going is more important than where she comes from: it's about an action view, an irrigation project without walls, derivating, out of frames.

We have just underlined one particular detail of this abounding *femmeusesaction*, but we could have chosen another way to introduce to its numerous plans, plugs and arborescences, escapes and connections. After this performance, the dance historian Geneviève Vincent told that she just had seen "an open book". This long way project is animated by the interactions between feminist, postcolonial, queer thoughts, and art postmodernity. Sure, sure... but a right reading of this book would make it dance under eyes, slight out of hands, explode at face.

In one sequence of the performance, Cécile Proust is ordering little wood pieces, a kind of building play (cf. Kapla). What she has just built is constantly collapsing, increasing ever and ever the tension of this construction scene. This is a power of deconstruction: not in the collapsing of the form, but in the freedom to always reconsider other possibilities for the construction of meaning. Moreover, her effective movements seem to be duplicated on a screen: she's apparently doing a similar action,



but not identical. Once more, we have just focused on a little element among lots of composing nineteenth *femmeusesactions*

Thanks to this fresh and clever performance, we understand how crossing choreographical thought with gender performance theories is absolutely and definitively destroying the conventional form of dance performance. “Gender performance” underlines of course how gender is made by a cultural construction. “Gender performance” indicates – almost in the proper, physical meaning – that the subject is constantly producing his/her part of this construction, endlessly reading and interpreting a role assignment score in actions.

From this results a very stimulating dynamic which is also desintegrating and destabilizing. It plays from unsettled margins of interpretative variability. We finally renounce to describe *femmeusesactions* #19, because this performance moves itself at the borders of a kaleidoscop of quotations, borrowings, commentaries, deductions, hypothesis. This wished instability is spread on a exploded space, composed by several screens, published dazibaos, available workbenches and gaping glazed wall.

Cécile Proust is assuming a daring displacement of the author function. She borrows to the choreographical thought by quoting Yvonne Rainer when she said that she knew well “ that the content of her thoughts is entirely composed by what she read, heard, said and dreamt. That she knows that thought is not something favoured, original, creative, and that the expression “cogito ergo sum” is at least unsuitable”. As she chooses to describe herself as a “sleeping-with-men-simile-lesbian”, she’s just making an incredible singular knot between intimacy and universality. A painful artistic act. Since 2004, her *femmeusesactions* are giving statements of the enormous power of impact that the meeting and exploration of a theory can have on a life. In all the declination of actions that she reviews or inspires.

As a reed offered to the wind of thoses experiments and influences, Cécile Proust is leading her action with maestria, nerve and talent.

Gérard MAYEN

femmeusesaction #18

Cécile Proust



femmeusesaction #1

Anne Lenglet, Cécile Proust



femmeusesaction #7.1

Martha Moore



Contrary to american artists, it is rare that french artists revendicate a feminist dimension in their work. So does Cécile Proust, as initiating the collective project *femmeuses* with numerous artists and theoreticians since 2004.

final/ment/seule is the nineteenth event of this manysides project: this one hour lecture-performance resumes efficiently the set of the sources, stakes, questions and performative modes, that Cécile Proust has explored since 4 years. *femmeusesaction #19, final/ment/seule* can firstly remind us the historical context in which art and feminism jointed together to irrigate and change society by protesting in the 60's; but we can also perceive this performance as a booster. Through its form, the performance reactivates the connections between theory and practice, personal and collective history, private and public that feminism has always developped, especially the work of Martha Rosler (who took part to *femmeuses* project), or Cindy Sherman. So is *final/ment/seule* performance both educational and activist. It is educational because Cécile Proust shows many elements of a certain social and intellectual context by reading and playing extracts of founding texts of feminism. Precisely, she reads texts of the gender theories (Eve Kosofsky Sedwick, Judith Butler). She shows also rares filmed archives: of the F.A.R.H. meetings (Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front) and of some performances of Hanna Wilke, Dayna Mac Load or Takako Yabuki are, depicting the rise of this emancipation, of this collective awareness in a singular speech. It is also an activist performance, since by asking questions, ordering or commanding, Cécile Proust invites people of the the audience to think about their habits, their intimate daily behaviour, and the ideological frames in which they are included. But beyond those historical and theoretical contents, the deal of *femmeusesaction #19 final/ment/seule* is an attitude, a particular tone, a kind of knowledge, a point of view concerning speech and power forms. It is mixing erudition and lightness, provocation and seriousness, empathy and detachment with a sense of humour declined from irony until burlesque. Away from any kind of feminist political cant, Cecile Proust dance performance is a welcoming invitation to feminism.

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