

Self Unfinished (Xavier Le Roy) and France's "Non-dance" movement

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On 6th May 2003, French journalist *Dominique Frétard* wrote in *Le Monde* titled "Announcement of the end of Non-dance" (*La fin annoncée de la non-danse*), which seemed making French contemporary dance community ado about nothing. The following year, he even published an illustrated color printed book named "Contemporary Dance: Dance and Non-dance, A 25-year History" (*Danse Contemporaine : Danse et Non-Danse, vingt-cinq ans d'histoires*), subjectively giving a conclusion on contemporary dance. Why this dance column journalist can't wait to throw non-dance into ashes of history?

The most important thing among these arguments is: What is dance?

It's a complete nonsense to raise this question when dance has established for ages. Looking back to dance history, since *Pina Bausch* opened a door for the traditional dance world at that time and brought "dance-theatre" into the house, it has broken the typical form of performing physical beauty, the interest in what moves the dancers is more important than how they move, it can even combine with social issues... Dance officially moves forward from modern to a much more vibrant and thriving contemporary age. There are so many different forms and schools that it is not exaggerate to say anything is possible, but among them, France's "Non-dance" movement in mid-90s, suggested performing with thrifty body concept, had irritated dance community: You don't even dance, then how come it is a dance?

Before answering this question, let's introduce one of the forerunners of non-dance movement, French choreographer *Xavier Le Roy*, who is going to perform ***Self Unfinished*** in the 23rd Macao Art Festival.

Non-dance movement focuses on conceptual physical performance. It attracts a number of non-dance creators participate into choreography, one of the examples is *Le Roy*. He started to work as a dancer after getting his doctorate degree in molecular biology. In 1992, he moved to Berlin and collaborated with the avant-garde group "Detektor". Then he had his first accomplished performance ***Self Unfinished*** in Berlin in 1998 and it was an initiation of his conceptual dance. The works that collaborated with Jérôme Bel are listed as non-dance movement's classics.

Non-dance tried to break free from bounds of traditional dance. Body, which makes up physical movements, is a battlefield of conceptual dance. The change pays a great impact because everyone has a body, if dance is just a physical manifestation, then everyone can dance. On the other hand, "non-dance" doesn't mean that the performer will not dance, Bel commented, "My work is not asking performers to dance, it's audience's mind (*La pensée*) to dance". Therefore, the connection between body and mind breaks Descartes' Western philosophy, the dualism "I think, therefore I am", it manifests with dance movements the philosophy (from East?) of combination of mind and body, digs a wide-open road for dance world.

On the all-white stage of ***Self Unfinished***, there is only a desk, a chair and a boom box. Choreographer and dancer *Le Roy* sat in front of the desk, watching the audience come in. Without opening lights, suddenly he stood up and turned on the boom box but it was soundless (silence is the soundtrack), leading audience into a mind journey about body, machine, biology, daily movements, dance performance, art forms etc. In a long silence, the dancer transformed his body in various absurd and hilarious ways, separated body from daily context and jumped into a world of imagination. The atmosphere was tensed for nearly one hour until the dancer pressed on the boom box - music "*Let's Dance*" broke the silence. It is powerful when it came to the end of the performance, but at the same time it is just the start of audience's dance in mind.

It was a huge success at that time, the work aroused a lot feedback from European dance community that encouraged Le Roy and the other non-dance makers to create more exquisite works and enrich contemporary dance. One of the non-dance major figures *Boris Charmatz* was even the associate artist for *Avignon Festival* in 2011. We will be known forever by the tracks we leave, so rather than questioning non-dance is dead or alive, let's see, how non-dance responses to dance? How non-dance influences contemporary dance? Perhaps ***Self Unfinished*** can offer Macao audience some inspirations.