

Tanya Leighton

M O T O R

THREE TIMES ONLY

BY JIMMY ROBERT FOR IAN WHITE



11: Jimmy Robert/Ian White, *6 things we couldn't do, but can do now*, 2004. Performed at Tate Britain, London. Photo by Sheila Burnett.

PARIS, JUNE 2023

I am writing from a tiny Parisian hotel and this may have influenced this title. Thinking of one night stands, and people who refuse to meet more than once even though they had a great time, and for some stupid rule that they haven't taken the time to reflect on. Three pieces is the number of works we made together.

Last weekend I fell into a K-hole and I thought of you, maybe because you had shown films at the lab [The Laboratory, Berghain]. Anyway, I thought this would be a great way to start this letter. It's been ten years since you've been gone. And with those years, the sarcasm, the wit, the dialogue, the acid dribbles, the scandalous sex, the experimental drugs... well maybe not all of it.

Writing this is harder than I thought as it forces a reflection that I may have blissfully resisted. What does it mean to work together and then alone? To go from duo to solo and to establish various forms of collaborations that allow the continuity of a certain dialogue.

A necessary dialogue in order to keep things in check, avoid complacency...

Let's go chronologically, incrementally:

6 things we couldn't do, but can do now, or when we allowed ourselves to become dancers while not being trained. I remember someone distinctly saying to us: 'How dare you dance?' Adopting the punk 'strategy' of going for what we don't know with no fear but an immense drive, we switched the dynamic of artist/curator to artist/artist. We supported each other in becoming dancers by learning *Trio A* from Yvonne Rainer and Pat Catterson. It felt historical then, it still does. Yvonne came and checked the details of a finger here, the gaze there. We were in awe. It was harder than we imagined, mostly for such a so-called democratic dance, but we were fearless. Lean and skinny then, we were 'the tall London boys' to her. Turning Yvonne's performance into an

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12: Jimmy Robert/Ian White, *Mariage à la mode et cor anglais*, 2007. Performed at STUK, Leuven. Photo by L.Bernaerts.

object, we danced alongside her on the stage; shown on a monitor, we were able to look at the choreography in its many facets. Like a rough diamond, rock hard and silent for over an hour. Tight jeans. We danced among many other things; art handlers hanging a drawing by John Cage, piano playing, moving chairs, a paper dance. Two nights only.

Mariage à la mode et cor anglais. Made for the theatre, this piece felt mannered, stylised. Dissecting Barthes and his *Camera Lucida*, the idea of photography and mourning. A portrait of Robert Wilson and Philip Glass by Robert Mapplethorpe. Off we were. Opera blasting, dramatic red curtain, lush robes, leggings and synchronised swimming and death drops. Death was always around as a theme, as a décor, as a drive. It was looming over us. 'AIDS generation,' you name it. It did not define us, but it became a form we embraced before it embraced us. Call it empowerment, but with all the elegance of a school play. We

went for it, shamelessly, rigorously. Rouge noir. 'To be alert is to be decorative' – Frank O'Hara.

Some time passed, separate practices emerged. You went on and did three wonderful pieces of your own: *IBIZA*, *Black Flags* and *Democracy*. I will always regret not seeing them at the DAAD in Berlin but was very happy to catch *Trauerspiel 1* at HAU. I noticed your wink/homage there, continuing the dialogue in a way only people who work together can tell; recurring forms, colours and a red rose bouquet.

Lemon Rose completes the circle somehow, finding ourselves in the place where we first met: the cinema auditorium. Bringing us back to the London days, at LUX when you showed my overly romantic Super 8 films shot in Paris with my family, my home movies. Using the films of Lis Rhodes (*Dresden Dynamo*) and Hollis Frampton (*Lemon*) as a way to establish a double self-portrait, questioning language through movements, texts and overlapping voices and

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13: Jimmy Robert/Ian White, *Lemon Rose*, 2012.
Performed at Jeu de Paume, Paris. Photo by Adrien Chevrot.

driving the projectionist of the Jeu de Paume gallery mad. We commented on experimental cinema while walking, cruising, and interviewing each other in the auditorium. We dissected ourselves in front of an audience in French and in English while spraying perfume delicately on each seat. It was the scent of freshly cut grass – bucolic and pedestrian at once, our quality. We broke down the relation with the screen in order to better define our roles in relation to movement, images and moving images. We wanted to challenge the expectations linked with such an auditorium as that of the Jeu de Paume. We seemed interchangeable for a moment; were we?

When you work with someone else one could say that you are in a constant state of provocation. You challenge yourself, get to the places where you expect to find the other. Surprise! They sometimes come and join you too in sites where you expected resistance. They can also punch you – then you punch them back. Together you move forward, you support and

elevate each other. You borrow vocabularies and construct new languages and idiosyncratic gestures: winks/homages between each other. Every work I do I hear your voice or at least I think I do. I need to keep the conversation going. Isn't it the only way we do things? Creating imaginary discussions, conflicts and arguments... After all these years the sound of you speaking still resonates, not just through my body but many others. Echoes filling the void.

I was not asked to write this text, but rather I put myself in a situation of having to do it. I was missing the dialogue that isn't one anymore. Bouncing back aimlessly but seriously.

I can hear your laugh or maybe see the beginning of a slight sneer. I wish this was a form of ventriloquism.

11–13: courtesy of Jimmy Robert;
the Artistic Estate of Ian White;
Stigter van Doesburg; Tanya
Leighton; Thomas Dane Gallery.

