

# VA



A Performance Piece By  
**Manuela Morgaine**  
[www.enverscompagnie.com](http://www.enverscompagnie.com)

# VA

*in memoriam Casanova*

Performance Piece

35mm color film, R.T. 24' (11' with dialogue, 13' MOS with live sound effects) The piece premiered in Paris in 1999.

Conceived and Directed by Manuela Morgaine With

Yann Collette in the part of Giacomo Casanova

Sound Effects (Foley Artist): Cyril Hernandez Sound:

Cookie

## **Subject:**

In 1756, at age 32, Giacomo Casanova escaped from Venice's Piombi Prison. At age 62, he tells the tale of the prison break in French. The story is reproduced from memory by a libertine whose life seems to unfold before his very eyes.

*Va* exists in some already remote, revisited moment in time. The escape plan is relayed first in words (by the actor), then with sounds (by the foley artist). It is the tragicomic story of a man who must reenact his life alone. *Va* is somewhere between a performance piece and a silent film with accompaniment. *Va* encapsulates the ghost of Casanova's words. *Va* is like the relic of a myth or what remains of it.

## **The Performance:**

A 35mm film is projected on an indoor or outdoor screen (depending on available venues) with a foley artist dubbing sound effects live.

Filmed in a single sequence shot with sound, actor Yann Collette reenacts Casanova's 1756 escape from the Piombi. Collette runs on an electric treadmill as he narrates the tale, which begins in 1756 and continues to the present day.

What follows is a series of silent close-ups of Casanova's face. These are excerpts from the sequence shot we have just seen and they should appear to us like the reassembled fragments of a memory. A foley artist, Cyril Hernandez, stands facing the screen and recreates the soundscape live. The suitcases at his side are filled with props (keys, sheets, shoes).

Though only 22 minutes long, the Venetian hero's breathtaking 1756 escape seems to last centuries, stretching all the way to ours.

**Video extract of the performance piece:** <https://vimeo.com/494750043>

Articles from the special edition of *Art Press* "Le cirque au-delà du cercle"  
#20, January 1999

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## "VA – ragtime"

Manuela Morgaine

*Ragtime is so named because of its ragged, syncopated and lively beat.*



On set at the Studio National du Fresnoy,  
29 April 1999.

(Ph.Olivier Ancelot)

Casanova tells how he escaped from the Piombi Prison in 1756. This fast-paced and syncopated narrative unfolds in close-ups before our very eyes. Casanova clammers over obstacles, digs, hoists himself over walls, crawls on all fours, falls down, claws at his clothes and skin until he is nothing more than a tattered rag doll. He becomes a shadow of himself: barefoot, brash and devil-may-care. The character, narrating his own story in the first person, gradually loses his clothes and composure during his escape.

Casanova's tale is 200 pages long. *Va* abridges it for the cinema to two 11-minute parts. There are four pages of text, two hands, two feet and two faces.

## "VA - un plan d'évasion"

Manuela Morgaine



"He has spent a long time walking.

He has spent a long time walking and is eager to arrive."

*Histoire du soldat, Ramuz - Stravinsky.*



*Le coup de pied dans le mur de L'homme du Pincio, a video by Alain Fleisher.*



An 11-minute sequence shot reduces the vast Ducal Palace with its Piombi Prison to a mere treadmill. Casanova makes his escape on its track. It rolls on and on like his barrage of syncopated words, the breathless tale of a race against time. His is the story of a circus freak forced to run the gauntlet, to execute an elaborate and grotesque escape plan while running in place. A fixed shot frames him against a black background. He faces us as he speaks and then walks away, gaining speed as he runs. He sprints all the way from the 18th century, 1756, to the present day on this inexorable conveyor belt of time. He sprints toward us in a straight line. He's out of the circus ring now, in front of the backdrop, and he appears to be making headway. He keeps a steady pace, pulling into the lead. Neither fire-eater nor lion-tamer, his act is to perform his story over and over again. He scales tall tales in a single bound. He rolls out his lines as time rolls out its treadmill. He knots sheets together as he runs, pulling them through the corridors of his prison like Ariadne's thread. He breaks windows and scales walls, wounding himself in the process. Elevated to the status of a myth, his life spans the ages. The character finally runs clear of his own era, shedding his lacey, silken clothes and wig, deteriorating and interiorating, undressing as he approaches us, becoming more and more himself. What starts off as raucous comedy, powdered with libertinism and punctuated with an aristocratic fake mole, turns into the tragedy of a man-doll reduced to a dripping mess, a puppet whose two faces end up blending into one.

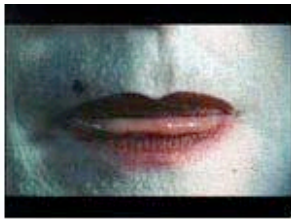
*A Dream of Escape:*

*In between the two films comes the only exterior shot. Casanova tells how he fell asleep on the roofs of Venice during his escape.*



## "VA – attraction"

Manuela Morgaine



*4 j'm s'at à marcher*



When there is no air left to tell the story with, a sound man takes the stage and breathes life back into it. With his suitcases full of equipment, he revisits the escape a second time. Like all foley artists he treads in place because a real step would send him into the screen he watches to stay synchronized. He dubs the actor's footsteps on the treadmill by tapping his foot against four cobblestones. The combined effect of the sounds and close-ups is otherworldly. Over the images of Casanova's feathered, three-cornered hat, the sound man creates the flutter of pigeons taking off from the Piazza San Marco (the four cobblestones). He does this using only a leather glove and a feather and the sounds themselves reach our ears like carrier pigeons. Not far away, a sound engineer is visible mixing the sounds live. He adds reverb and filters. He amplifies, spatializes, delays and deepens the foley artist's effects, murmurs and rhythms. Both have their eyes glued to the images as though to the image of a heartbeat

on screen. A soundtrack made of fragments from the story mixed with the whirring of the treadmill and the sound of the actor breathing is looped back over images of his mouth, feet and hands like a delayed memory. These sounds

are patched through live concert speakers while the actual sound of the film comes from behind the screen. This crackling of dust on the film's otherwise silent optical band grows louder with each projection due to wear and tear. *Va* is like an ever-changing body. The sound of a breath being released is the last sound to reach our ears over the image of a face dripping with sweat and tears like the syncopated language of a kiss.

## "VA - je te suis des yeux"

Manuela Morgaine

What follows is a second version of the same story, only this time filmed in close-ups as though through the keyhole of a prison cell or through a fake eye across whose glass cornea flicker dreams of escape. Sabine Lancelin holds the camera as she did for Philippe Grandrieux's *Sombre*. Indeed, *Sombre* has guided *Va* in its need to stay riveted to a face, to keep it in the frame, and not just any face, but that of Yann Collette the duality of which has deeply marked the project from the beginning. The camera traces the lines of a body, drawing the architecture of escape across its rigid hand, over the shifting ruffles of its shirt, past its mouth and through the skylight of its eye to freedom. The body morphs into an escape route, condensing history, framing it. The feet, hands, mouth, eyes, and folds of ragged flesh are constantly in motion. They all run the race, they all ask for a certain eroticism. Eros (Casanova) and Thanatos (Va) watch us from behind the looking glass, Eros with his single all-embracing eye and Thanatos with his eye that blinks with a doll's weighted lid. This second film is silent, as though the first, the sequence shot, had used up all its oxygen. Yet it is the same film, seen from very close up, discom-bobulated and without speech. It is a song made of syncopated gestures, a ragtime.



# Casanova 99

*Une attraction du MK2 Beaubourg.*



**Yann Collette**  
incarne le  
séducteur  
dans un  
monologue  
de 22 mn.

O. ANSELOT

**L**e MK2 Beaubourg innove en proposant une attraction particulièrement originale autour d'un court métrage, *Va*. Sur le thème de Casanova s'évadant de la prison des Plombs à Venise, Yann Collette (*Le Bossu*) y interprète un monologue tiré des mémoires du célèbre séducteur et nous conduit - par un artifice pour l'instant secret - de 1756 à 1999 en 22 minutes. Une projection accompagnée en direct dans la salle par un bruiteur. Le comédien a pris un vrai plaisir à cette expérience réalisée par Manuela Morgaine, assistée d'une bonne partie de l'équipe technique du *Temps retrouvé* de Raoul Ruiz. « Je suis content d'avoir fait *Va*, explique Collette, parce que ça me rassure de voir qu'il y a des gens assez fous pour imaginer un tel projet, et de savoir que je suis encore assez fou moi-même pour l'accepter. Accepter ce plan-séquence où je cours de plus en plus vite en jouant ce texte magnifique, mais vraiment délicat à interpréter. Accepter cette belle fuite vers l'imaginaire. » Retrouvez cet immense comédien de théâtre, trop rare sur grand écran, dans cet étonnant projet, tous les jours, du 16 au 23 juin, au MK2 Beaubourg. (Tarif : 25 F, réservations : 08 36 68 14 07.)

## Allons à «Va»

**Nouveauté.** Pour définir *Va*, attraction pour un acteur et un bruiteur (*in memoriam* Casanova), sa conceptrice Manuela Morgaine explique qu'il s'agit «d'une forme de théâtre envisagée pour l'avant-scène d'un cinéma», soit un spectacle de trente minutes, qui emprunte diverses trajectoires sensorielles (dans l'espace et dans le plan, dans la musique et le bruitage en direct, dans l'interprétation de Yann Collette).

Une curiosité sensible à explorer d'un œil neuf ●

O.S.t

*Le République, 18, rue du Fbg-du-Temple, XI<sup>e</sup>. Gratuit. Ce soir 20h30 précises.*

### Attraction pour un acteur et un bruiteur

Un titre laconique, « Va », pour une soirée sibylline au croisement du cinoche, de la performance et de l'attraction. Selon certaines sources, il s'agirait d'une création sur le thème de Casanova s'évadant de la prison des Plombs à Venise. Un ensemble composé d'un court métrage, d'une action sur scène (avec l'acteur Yann Colette) et de bruitages. Le tout est d'une durée totale de 27 minutes. Bizarre, bizarre...

Jusqu'au 23 juin, 19h30, MK2  
Beaubourg, 3<sup>e</sup>.

**Jacques Morice**



**Va** is preceded by **Amorces**.

## **AMORCES**

35mm film leaders in black and white and color - 1927/1999 - 3 minutes

With the cooperation of the projectionists Gabriel, Fred, Luc, Olivier, Maurice, Christophe, Eric, and others.

Editor: Gabriel Trocino

Live Beats: Cyril Hernandez

My father died recently, which means I am no longer counting the days he has left to live. I took his wristwatch, for his time is over. It now ticks on my wrist. I look at the watch's face, its hands. Its roman numerals are like tally marks scratched into a prison wall by its occupant. I look at this clock face as though it were a memory screen, not round, but rectangular. It is the screen our lives are projected on, the glass that covers our family photos, like a movie frame showing man in motion with its turning hands. The watch, whose time is always running out, takes me backward in time like a countdown.

I got the idea of using film leaders from this backward motion. I'm looking for a way to get to the heart of the matter, film matter. The raw material of film, its oil. "Départ pour l'image," an expression found at the beginning of all the film leaders in France gives me the key. Just like a rocket launch, the cinematic image has its own countdown: 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 2. Projectionists are supposed to leave these leaders in place. Happily for me, generations of disobedient projectionists have lobbed them off and kept them rolled up in boxes or canisters for possible reuse. I must collect them. I crisscross Paris at nightfall, going from movie house to movie house, especially in the Latin Quarter. I walk into projection booths and tell the staff about my project to make a little 3-minute movie by splicing together hundreds of these film leaders, these little bits of film, from different countries and periods, in black and white and color, and in no particular order. I do my best to win their confidence and gain their cooperation.

I am looking for three types of leaders: countdowns (which are Casanova's cue, the starting block of his race); China Girls, who posed at the end of reels next to color charts to measure skin tones and luminosity (they are like Casanova's collection of women); and test patterns, whose geometrically variable shapes helped projectionists focus the projector (these will be like star charts, the colors and shapes of all the countries traveled through by our hero). These images give rise to a fiction, lending meaning and beauty to frames of film that have never before been seen because they came before the film itself.

And so I began to work with an ant's industriousness and attention to detail. I would find 20 seconds in one cinema, sometimes 4 seconds in another, and 4 extremely rare seconds of a Persian film leader in another. I found treasures, China Girls from the 30s, a leader in Japanese ideograms from a film by Akira Kurosawa, cosmogonic test patterns, roman and Arabic numerals. The world came together leader by leader. This was a film without a shoot, an never-ending film without credits and with no beginning or end. I wrap these images around me like a pearl necklace. And there is only one print of the film: an assembly of back-to-back leaders so fragile it is soon destined to disappear. That is why I asked a musician to invent a living rhythm to accompany it. He plays a countdown, improvises the rhythm of a watch-hourglass, which recomposes movement out of the ashes and scattered remains of these films.

*Va*, preceded by *Amorces* has been presented in the following venues:

- Studio National du Fresnoy (Tourcoing) 10 June 1999
- Festival Côté Court (Pantin) 11 June 1999
- MK2 Beaubourg (Paris) 16 to 22 June 1999
- La Ferme du Buisson (Noisiel) 7 to 10 October 1999
- Cinéma Les Toiles (St Gratien), Cinéma L'écran (Saint Denis), République Cinéma (Paris) Décembre 1999
- Le Lieu unique (Nantes) du 7 January to 13 January 2002

Production:

**Envers compagnie**

[www.enverscompagnie.com](http://www.enverscompagnie.com)

Oparts – Valerio Maria Ferrari

Studio Nationale du Fresnoy – Alain Fleischer

Thécif

Drac Ile-de-France

## TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

To be supplied by the venue

### Staff:

- a projectionist for 2 four-hour shifts
- a stage manager for 3 four-hour shifts

### Sound material:

- A 220 volt power strip with 4-pair supply
- A 16/4/4/2 mixer (Soundcraft Venue or equivalent)
- A 2-channel 31 band equalizer (APEX or equivalent)
- A minidisk player

### Micro

- 4 AKG 451 + capsule CK1 (cardioid) with clips
- 2 AKG 535 + clips and dual/stereo bar
- 3 SM 57 Shures with clips
- A DI Box
- 10 boom stands (four of them small)
- 1 4-pair cable – length depends on the venue (allow for enough cable to run from the movie screen to the Dolby system speakers)
- 12 15-meter XLR cables with modules
- Connections for minidisk player, equalizer, reverb generator with jack inputs and outputs, and the four outputs on the mixer if they too are jack

### Speaker Configuration:

The performance uses the movie theater's native speakers. The four mix outputs will be patched directly into speakers corresponding to left center, right center, left ambiance and right ambiance, without going through the Dolby decoder. The movie sound will be sent in mono through the center speaker.

### Light:

- 6 3-hole "cloverleaf" power cords, 2 splitters, 220v 16A

Plan to install a "sound pillow " and a CD player connected to a small speaker in the theater entrance.

## **MANUELA MORGAINE**



Born in 1962, she lives and works in Paris.  
A writer and director, both for movies and the stage, she oversees the Envers Compagnie, which has been devoted to the production of multidisciplinary works since 1991.

She received the Prix de Rome in stage design in 1994.  
She was a laureate of the Villa Médicis Hors les Murs prize in 2004.

[www.enverscompagnie.com](http://www.enverscompagnie.com)

## **YANN COLLETTE**



[https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yann\\_Collette](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yann_Collette)

**CYRIL HERNANDEZ**



<https://www.latruc.org/fr/lequipe-fr>