

## **Our Bodies Ourselves: A Treatise on Sensation**

As I look out across the vast, canary yellow linoleum an ecstatic voice exclaims "Time is money in late modern capitalism". Moriah Evans does not like to waste time in the studio.

It is a Thursday afternoon in Vienna and I fix my gaze on the word 'RAUCHVERBOT'. It is printed in large, angular capital letters on the upper part of the huge concrete wall in front of me. I am attempting to slowly follow the outline of the letters with my left kidney. As I do this, imagine that the texture of the tool I am using -fleshy, moist- is replacing the angularity of the font with a delicate, almost calligraphic expression. The task is fairly simple. Choose an organ (left kidney), choose a 'mode' (drawing), and choose a 'mode of address' (the architecture of the space).

'Our Bodies Ourselves: A Treatise on Sensation' was the only week long workshop I attended at the Impulstanz Festival this year. The movement practice is a manifestation of a one and a half year research pursued by Evans and her colleagues. The practice, explains Evans, has been influenced by the texts of a number of scholars, and the title is a direct reference to a work written by French philosopher Etienne Bonnot de Condillac 'A Treatise on Sensations'. In essence, Condillac's 'Treatise' proposes -of course, it is a little more complex than this- that the starting point for all knowledge, the development of how we perceive the world and therefore our ability to act in the world, originates from the senses.

"I sense therefore I am" explains Evans half serious, half in jest. Barbara Kruger's 'I shop therefore I am' springs to mind, and it is for this witty, poignant humour that my appreciation for Evans grew as the week progressed.

"We actually moved", I uttered at the end of day one, a prejudgement I have come to realise as problematic, not just for my inner sceptic, but for the dance field as a whole. From my experience 'conceptual dance', if for the moment we can embrace the ambiguity of this term, has earned itself quite the stigma amongst dancers as a 'less-physical' branch of contemporary dance. I must admit, I found the wordy workshop description on the Impulstanz website slightly intimidating, but in my case, and hopefully in the case of others, it is important to embrace artistic experiences that are potentially outside one's comfort zone.

Having that said, what 'Our Bodies Ourselves: A Treatise on Sensation' proposes is, to put it simply, a pragmatic, multi layered system with a means to generate movement from the pursuit of internal sensation. The layers of this system are built as such; 1) Initiate movement from an organ of your choice, 2) Express this movement through a 'mode' (Evans proposes five modes; Vibration, Rhythm, Electrocution, Drawing, Displacement), 3) Direct these actions through various 'modes of address' (varying in scale from the surface of your skin, to the architecture of the space, to the cosmos). There are several other layers that we explored during the course of the workshop which gave us tools to add texture and nuance our physicality.

What I find interesting, and at the same time extremely confronting, is the sense of responsibility one has for their engagement in the practice, something Evans refers to as 'radical autonomy'. In this sense, it is the one engaging in the practice that authors how 'non-physical' it becomes. Although the focus of the practice is a pursuit of internal sensation, from my rather short experience, this does not necessarily mean that one shifts their awareness and perception inwards. What serves the practice is actually projecting these internal sensations outwards, and for that, I imagine, Evans created the 'modes of address'.

'Our Bodies Ourselves' -to paraphrase its name- is the sort of practice that requires a lot of 'doing', a lot of self reflection, and a lot of perseverance, as the system alone does not support the dancer enough for movement to manifest by itself. It is an ongoing quest without a clear point of arrival. There is no predetermined physical aesthetic, although the tasks do produce a similar physicality in different bodies, if embodied fully. Evans is not concerned with whether or not the one's engaged in her practice are actually vibrating their hearts and addressing them to the cosmos, for her the importance lies in the pursuit, in the absolute belief that this is physically possible.

Just as she exclaimed that Thursday afternoon -of course, half in jest- that time is money in late modern capitalism, as dance artists, it is becoming increasingly clear that we do not have time to waste. We must continue to pursue the impossible, we must move past 5,6,7,8 and explore the expression of our bodies beyond what we deem them capable of. What better way is there to spend our time in the studio?

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Edward Lloyd