

NEGOTIATING TIME: CAN THE TEMPORARY LEAVE A TRACE?

SUMMARY FROM NEGOTIATING SPACES SALON SERIES, THE SHED, THE NATIONAL THEATRE LONDON, 25 JUNE 2013

Matthias Sperling, choreographer

Choreography is a good wrestler with the question: can the temporary leave a trace? Among my current projects, this knack that choreography has is perhaps most evident in my adaptation of a solo choreographic score that I commissioned from the choreographer Deborah Hay, a leading figure in post-modern dance.

In this unique annual project, first designed by Hay 14 years ago, she invites up to 20 experienced choreographer/performers to commission her to create a solo score. Everyone works together for ten days to learn the score under Hay's direction, before going their separate ways to independently begin the process of creating their own adaptation of it, through practicing the score once a day, five days a week, for a minimum of nine months before it is performed publicly.

In Hay's work, the choreographic score takes the form of a highly specific use of written language that triggers the performance but is not prescriptive of precise movement outcomes. She writes the score in such a way that it is not possible to give it a singularly permanent, wholly repeatable manifestation: it can only be performed by engaging in a negotiation between the landscape that the score defines and the performer's constantly unfolding perception within it.

Through daily practice, the architecture of the score evolves an increasingly tangible identity, while at the same time always remaining un-fixed. As dance artist Rachel Krische has said of her own experience of this work, it is a practice of "drawing a line in pencil with one hand, while at the same time continually rubbing it out with the other". The performer is always

making the trace, but keeping it temporary; establishing a pattern while also unpatterning it - creating a travelling horizon that sustains a space of possibility between the patterning and the unpatterning.

That space is important because it offers the possibility to exercise agency, for although my body, brain and mind could not begin to function in the world without the profound support of my habitual, familiar patterns of action, the automaticity of those deeply embedded patterns distances me from my capacity to consciously choose how or when those patterns are triggered. In order to exercise choice, I need to actively and continually re-awaken my awareness of the habitual and dissociate my action from it. Only then, within that temporary space, does it become possible for me to re-direct my action along other paths.

www.matthias-sperling.com