

Improvisation for butoh body and a clarinet

Trails is the most recent project of the Tricity based artist TO-EN and yet another step in the strenuous task of paving the path for the butoh dance in Poland. Let us picture an empty space of the Pionova Gallery – white walls surrounding a grey floor, with sliding metal door on the right. A single bulb hanging from the ceiling shedding warm dim light. Then a smartly clad man with a clarinet enters the space to be soon joined by the dancer in an off-the-shoulder navy-blue dress in and celadon, too long for her height. The musician starts playing, alternating the moments in which he abruptly stops or lingers with the sounds. The clarinet either cries or sings. That is when the dancer begins to move, but not dance. To call *Trails*, “an improvisation for butoh body and a clarinet” a dance performance would be a heresy. During less than half an hour long show the dancer TO-EN (Anna Bralkowska) strides across the stretch of four meters with a hardly noticeable movement.

There is nothing there to catch the eye apart from the two performers. Thus the painfully minimalistic movement seemingly detached from the music becomes the only focus of attention. A small dose of stillness and concentration however renders the austere performance irresistible. *Trails* do not submit for a review. However, there is a number of questions mounting, like: by the means of what mystery the butoh dance technique has its bearing on the viewers. TO-En does not facilitate the task as she does not refer the viewers to anything familiar. Her butoh is not a “dance of darkness” built on the aesthetics of ugliness or old age. The movement of *Trails* could hardly be referred to as releasing the inner energy. Still, the mastership of Marcin Malinowski’s performance together with TO-EN’s movement seize the empty space entirely. There is no beginning, no end, no trace of linearity or a plot but the mutual listening of the musician and the body of the dancer emptied of any intention, instead. Her narrowed, unseeing eyes look inwards and her body, rather than moving by itself is moved by the surrounding sounds, light, the presence of the viewers. All this resonates echoing from the blank walls and returns to hit her body, which is lowered on the half-bent knees shifting the centre of gravity backwards as if leaning against something invisible behind. Standing on her heels she wiggles the raised toes. The moment we manage to imagine the diffusing waves resembling circles on the water we are also able to comprehend why her movements do not follow every sound of the clarinet. We are just left with the mere trails cast far away from its source.

For TO-EN, who began her artistic career in Sweden in the butoh dance group: SU-EN Butoh Company this was not the first experiment with the European perception of a dance performance. *Trails* can be assailed of inaccessibility, illegibility of the message, just like in the case of the previous realization – *Mélange*. However, this project is more consistent, perfected in all aspects and on the whole – stunning.

The performance was held on March the 8th in the Pionova Gallery.

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