

ON WILD ACCESS

reflections on the dance piece by Beatrix Joyce

Savage writing about the dance piece "Wild Access" by Beatrix Joyce, performed on the running track of Sportplatz Monumentenstraße, Berlin, September 2021. Integral to the performance were the streets of Schöneberg and a soundtrack to be listened to via headphones.

Text commissioned by the artist.

This is exactly the layout I want. A longitudinal one. A stretched one. One that goes right from the left-hand side of the page to the very very very.....furthest.....right_____ Here!

Why do I want it? I want it so that you, the reader, can really feel the stretching sensation as your eyes have to move all the way to the other side of the page.

I want you to feel the effort it takes. I want you to be aware of your eye balls in their sockets as they pivot slowly from the left to the right, your eye lashes intermittently obstructing your vision when you blink to add some moisture to the surface of your eye-balls.

I want you to run after the words, one after the other, linguistic hurdles, the white space between each word is the trench that you have to leap over.

And while reading, you will have to turn your head to see the end of the sentence. Because there, at the far end of the line, there will be a _____ full stop.

Why do I want this? Because I want you to have a sense of horizontality, of something that takes its time until it reaches the end of something. I want you to feel some measure of mild strain while reading this text, and to experience an emerging desire to know what comes next. Like a child that cannot wait for the page to turn to see how the story will go on. In your case you will have to follow this line of text. _____ Follow me. _____ Follow me.

Stay with me. _____ Until the last page.

Why is that so important?

Choreographer Beatrix Joyce spent months running through the flat landscapes of Berlin, counting the miles, taking in the terrain. She also learnt how to sprint on a track. And whenever you run or sprint, you are effectively highlighting horizontality. You are always running towards what comes next, and once you have reached “next”, you set yourself a new “next”, a new goal. And then another one, and another one. And since I will be writing about her work “Wild Access”, this sense of going “next” and “next” and “next” on a seemingly never-ending flat line is essential. And as much as I would like to write on an unravelling parchment, and as they are rather expensive, I opted for my editing software’s landscape format instead.

What is so wild about her access?

And what are we accessing here, actually?

Beatrix Joyce is a choreographer with a keen interest in non-conventional spaces for dance and movement. Add to that the circumstances of a global outbreak of a pandemic where open spaces are generally favoured over closed ones. This immediately rules out the use of the conventional space for dance, the theatre. So the choice for an outside performance setting was at hand.

She was keen to access a space which is normally inaccessible for the dance world. For that, however, she had to demonstrate stamina, as the bureaucratic hurdles in front of her were not dissimilar to a parcours with pits and barriers in the shape of unanswered phone calls and trails of emails.

She succeeded. And was given access.

And now it's my turn to be given access. Not with a key to a gate, but rather with a pair of flashy headphones like all the other people who have gathered near the train station on this Friday in the mild breeze of September.

We are led through the city by three guides. Across streets, waiting at traffic lights, making sure we are keeping up. Where we are going, we do not know. Some clues are in the soundtrack coming from the headphones — maybe a playground. Or a football pitch. Dogs bark. Are they right behind me or in the headphones? The plasticity of the heavy breathing, the peep of a whistle and children laughing blend into street noises concocting an uncanny hybrid of sonic impressions. My ears take in what is coming through the headphones and everything else as well. They do not discriminate between a pressure wave created by an action that took place a long time ago and was converted to an MP3 file, and a pressure wave that has just been produced by a passing car, 10 inches in front of me.

I am in a pleasant state of mild confusion about what is real and what is recorded, and — trusting my guides — walk towards an unknown destination.

The voice in the headphones starts telling me about the experience of running and training, every day. Exhaustion, excitement, progress in performance, or lack thereof. These diary entries sound like spoken word performance, or the curves of an electrocardiogram. “Today, I am feeling energetic” (uppermost point on the y-axis), “I can’t concentrate today” (slightly lower point on the y-axis), “I am so exhausted that my ankles hurt and there is a pain under my right shoulder that will not disappear as I run” (near zero on the y-axis).

Our heads are lit by the blue, green and red LEDs on our headphones. Lights bob as we form a queue, a little marching congregation, worming its way through the city to the friendly wonder of passers-by. Are we listening to music? Is it a silent disco? Are we on a mission? Their faces reveal a mixture of curiosity and amusement.

I don’t know the answers to their questions myself, either, and I am rather happy about my neglectful attitude towards the development of my experience of the show. I give up control and I become a witness to someone else trying to control their body while also being

mindful about its wellbeing. But what is their goal? To increase performance? To win the national field track games? To compete against themselves? To increase their physical fitness? To dance better? At this point I still have no idea, but I willingly allow the blur of confusion to soften the edges of my mind's inner workings.

We arrive at a huge metal gate. It's open and we are ushered inside.

We see huge flood lights, a wide, open expanse, its surface covered in green astro turf. Alongside it runs an athletics track with its recognisable red rubbery coating. Crickets are chirping. We are led onto the track, we walk along the middle line. I feel ripped out of my pleasant stupour. I feel exposed. The track is long, my steps are soft and - I am not running.

There is a person in the distance, gaining speed. No, that's not correct. Two people, with their swinging ponytails, one behind the other. They are running towards us. Ghosts from nowhere who split us like Moses the waters. They weave between us, but manage to find their way through the crowd without a single collision.

The multi-coloured headphones-wearing congregation moves to the sides, settling on a bench and on top of a low brick wall at the very end of the race track.

The two performers take up their positions with outstretched thumbs and forefingers, hands equidistant from each other, heads facing forward, feet apart. The performers' hips raise, there is a moment of concentration and then they are gone in opposite directions.

The one running away from us is immediately swallowed by the twilight.

She then reappears, as if out of a myth, a creature borne of mist. This repeats itself several times. There is a disturbance on the track. The slick movement pattern is not as slick as the tracks' straight lines might suggest. Whenever the runners are adjacent to one another on the track, it is as though an invisible power pushes them sideways, as though they are blown apart by some kind of detonation. They run and they run. They come towards us like an arrow, only to disappear again.

It is getting dark. And this changes everything. It can get dark in a theatre, too — but when night settles in outdoors, it can be witnessed like an intervention, taking place high above the audience's heads, with shades of colour, shape-shifting clouds, wind, possibly even rain drops. It enters into the performance as a reminder of the outer, all-encompassing conditions set by Nature.

And when the day draws to a close_____the horizon gives up its existence.

The runners run away from the audience, into a jet black ink blot that is descending onto the red track.

The audio track transforms into a long winding saxophone tone as though someone is breathing into the instrument without respite. The runners are in motion,

stopping,

changing position,

stopping,

changing position,

run

stop

run

they twist around each other, as if one is the alter ego of the other and they are wrestling with each other.

A string of spotlights attached to black stands are arranged at regular distances next to the running track. Like this:

spotlight-----spotlight-----spotlight-----spotlight-----spotlight-----spotlight-----spotlight

I did not copy and then paste “spotlight-----”. I typed out every word individually and pushed the hyphen key repeatedly to mark the distance, so I, too, could feel the repetition in my fingers. The spotlights highlight the runners’ starting positions, their concentration, their readiness to perform at speed.

Whoever has trained to become a runner, or any type of athlete, knows that repetition is part and parcel of improvement. These spotlights look like they are assessing the runners’ progress. Have they hit the mark they set themselves this morning? Will they discuss their goals with their trainer nearby? Who is that person in dark clothing hovering around the two runners, or rather, the runner and her alter ego?

Sunset is over. Night has settled in.

Huge light panels are being rolled onto the track. The runners enter a zone of delirium, or so it seems. They roll over each other, they jump into fast-paced exercises which they carry out synchronously. The saxophone drone in my headphones is never ending, never ending.

And then the end arrives.

It is very much unexpected and very much highlights the horizontal line.

There is silence is in the headphones and the crickets near the track are audible again.

The runner and her alter ego are far away from each other. The track feels long again. So long that communication between the two of them is being carried out with flashlights.

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blink----blink-blink-----bliiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiink-----blk-blk-blk-blk-----blink-blink-blink-----blink-----blink-blink----
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I take off my headphones, and for the first time, I hear the performers breathing, heavily.