

ON “PHYSIS”

and short meditations on the dance of the cosmos

“Physis” by Moritz Majce and the dancers Johanna Ackva, Ágnes Grélinger, Zuki Ringart, Cary Shiu and Yuri Shimaoka is a process-oriented and participatory movement space, where the performers, the audience and the space activate each other through dance and presence. With this format, Moritz Majce aims at constructing a space of movement for performers and audiences alike. The work emerges from the relational movement practice called Relational Flow, a term coined by Moritz Majce. Since initiating Relational Flow in collaboration with Sandra Man in 2019, he has consistently been developing this choreographic tool by means of performances and workshops.

Due to the participatory nature of this practice, the creation phase requires the attendance of an “accompanying” audience. In this sense, I accompanied the process during the rehearsal phase and I also attended two of the public presentations of “Physis” in the frame of Fold – New Works #2 at Tanzfabrik in February 2023. The following text, commissioned by the artist, contains an account of my sensorial experience of accompanying this work along with two short meditations (in italics) that it inspired in me.

In the foyer, I leave my belongings and take off my shoes; upon touching the floor with the soles of my feet, the ground feels instantly more familiar, more intimate to my body. “‘Physis’ is a live installation. The movement of the dancers relates to your presence”, reads a sentence on the programme note, which initiates a slight shift in my perception, directing it inwards, towards my sense of presence in this place and time. From a pile I take a meditation pillow and hold it close to my chest; its weight rests pleasantly in my arms. As I walk into the movement space, a concentrated atmosphere welcomes me.

The studio is stripped bare of its theatrical equipment; it feels wide open and warmly lit. There are several attendants¹ sitting on pillows spread across the floor or standing against the walls. I have entered a space in movement, where five performers dance among a roaming audience, their body language significantly distinctive. Having sensed my entry, two dancers are caught in a moment of stillness; I acknowledge their response. I directly feel I am part of something. Their stillness ripples across the whole group, like a contagious force. I walk a half circle around the space to look at the situation from different perspectives until I land on my pillow on the floor.



Physis by Moritz Majce, Photo by Kata Kwiatkowska

An audience of different ages and genders sitting, laying down and standing randomly in space, three performers dancing among them in close proximity to each other and to the attendants.

¹ I use this term to indicate the audience. ‘Attendant’ underlines the participatory nature of this work in which the attendance to it directly affects the dance of the performers.

The door remains wide open behind me. Other attendants drop in, one at the time. At each new entry, the group of performers is affected by a perceivable change in movement, dynamically or rhythmically. It is not a readable or predictable change, rather, it can be sensed. As I settle down in this environment, I attune my sense of sight, hearing and presence ever more acutely, not only to the dancers but to my surroundings. I notice the other attendants being similarly engaged. We exchange complicit gazes, while the dancers move closer and closer to our bodies; we share a smile, a sigh. Someone moves their leg to create space for a performer to lie down beside them. As the dancers relate to our presence, we simultaneously relate to theirs. It is a deeply ecological thought to become aware of the fact that we are not solely spectators of our environment, but unquestionably part of it.

Imagine submerging your feet into a shallow lake, your soles resting on the sand just a palm-width below the surface of the clear water. Imagine looking at your feet from above, feeling the freshness of the water and the wetness of your skin. As you find stillness a shoal of small fish, approaches your toes, and the fish become more and more confident that you are just another inlet of the shoreline. As they gain trust, they, together as one being, come as close as to softly touch your toes, gently nibbling at the surface of your skin. They eat away at the dead skin-cells and parasites that make up your epidermic ecosystem. You are their environment, until at the faintest movement they all swim away in an instant.

As the situation unfolds, I contemplate a moving landscape, in which my focus shifts from the large panoramic view to the smallest detail. I gaze at a performer's naked toe sticking to the floor and their slow-bending fingertips, tracing a little journey in the air across my field of sight. Its simplicity fascinates me. I hear the sliding sound of bodies rubbing against the larger body of space, the floor, the wall, the radiator - am I even hearing the sound of their skin rubbing against the air?



Physis by Moritz Majce, Photo by Kata Kwiatkowska

Three attendants sitting on the floor, one performer dancing on the floor with one leg lifted in the air. The attendant's gaze closest to the performer is directed at the performer's lifted foot.

I become hyper-receptive to the movements surrounding me, while the city's soundscape infiltrates through the walls, the windows and the open doors. And yet silence is louder than everything else. Perhaps it has become our common language; the common agreement of being inexorably present in the here and now. This silence has a grandiose presence, contemplation at its purest, a meditative state of witnessing a dynamic transformation. It allows for moments of intimacy with strangers as the performers hover over the seated attendants, extending a limb or flexing a finger. I feel a moment of softness, an encounter that is felt. I witness a performer being touched by my gaze.

Imagine a cup of tea placed in front of you. Observe the steam lifting off the hot surface and fading into the air as it brushes your cheeks. Smell the aroma of the tea and see the light reflecting on its tinted surface. As you look deeper into the cup, notice five leaves of tea resting in stillness at the bottom. As you lift the cup to your mouth, notice how they gently lift off and float in the sway of the gesture. As you sip the tea, the leaves spiral to the surface, closer to your lips. As you taste the hot tea on your tongue, to then swallow it, you lower the cup back down onto the table in front of you. Notice how the tea and the stirred-up leaves continue to dance in your cup. As the hot tea travels down your throat and warms your core, the leaves slowly settle back down and rest at the bottom of the cup.

Some attendants reposition themselves, standing up, taking their pillows and walking somewhere else in space. As they move it provokes an initiation force that propels the dancers' improvisations in space, and simultaneously as the dancers orbit around the attendants they are compelled to resettle. Bodies are falling in and out of place. It feels as if an electromagnetic force is stirring up the room, blurring the boundaries between who is moving whom.



Physis by Moritz Majce, Photo by Kata Kwiatkowska

Several attendants sitting on the floor and looking at two performers dancing between them.

I feel invited to question my agency as an attendant in space and more broadly as a human in the world. Suddenly a large group of attendants stands up and starts crossing the space. I feel moved! It's as if their gravitational force is pulling me with them. I start to walk too, feeling an inner wave of excitement; are we dancing? Together we are riding energetic waves that arise in patterns. We ready ourselves; we commit to being carried away. As quickly as they rise, they fall. We drop into a slow settling silence, a stillness that makes me realise again and again that we are all dancing together.

In encountering "Physis" I am reminded of the book "The Tao of Physics" by Fritjof Capra (1975), in which the author draws a parallel between modern physics and Eastern mysticism, suggesting that mystical thought provides a consistent and relevant philosophical background to the theories of contemporary science; a conception of the world in which man's scientific discoveries can be in perfect harmony with their spiritual aims. The two basic themes of this conception are the unity and interrelation of all phenomena and the intrinsically dynamic nature of the universe.

I feel that "Physis" aims at artistically portraying the dynamic nature of time and change within the relationship of the dancing bodies, their accompanying attendants and their shared environment. I feel invited in the constructed yet unpredictable experience of a cosmos, seen as one inseparable reality; in motion, alive, spiritual and material at the same time.



Physis by Moritz Majce, Photo by Kata Kwiatkowska

Two performers in the foreground, dancing on the floor, four attendants in the background sitting against the wall or lying down on the floor.