

Tracey Warr - A Moving Meditation on a Dead Line

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Moving. Going. In October 2001 I went with UK performance group, Optik, to Sao Paulo, Brazil (Edwards, 2003). Optik explore moving. And

Walking

Running

Colliding

Rocking

Falling

Rolling

Laying

Standing

Sitting

Seeing

Looking

Listening

Feeling

Focusing

Waiting

Deciding

Being

Stopping.

Walking. Taking a line for a walk. The three Optik performers walk and run in straight lines with Brazilian students in dance studios in Sao Paulo and Campinas. Their lines are moving sculpture in space. They make fleeting connections and collaborations. They fill a space, a void, gaps, with their moving. They fall into entrainment – walking or running together. They mirror each other. They lay down on the spot where someone else

has just stood up. They walk to an internal rhythm – a body clock. They invade or do not invade invisible territories – body space, in your face. They do not go backwards. They do not waver from their straight line. No circling, serpentine or wriggling. I sit on the floor watching, their static recorder. Grounded.

If Optik encounter an obstacle on the line they are moving along – a wall or another body – they may walk or run on the spot, they may embrace the obstacle, they may fall down, they may turn and take their line another way and if it is a body, they may push the obstacle off their trajectory and continue or they may continue with the obstacle – the body - attached. They may stop.

Continuing. Anarchic lines of revellers follow carnival floats in Sao Paulo, progressing, processing, shuffling, whirling, dancing. Ravers trance dance and resonate to music that mimics and amplifies the rhythms, thumps and shudderings of the body. Losing consciousness in movement. One of the Optik performers actually suffers from narcolepsy. Stopped abruptly in mid-sentence, mid-consciousness. Falling to the floor and slumping in a chair, dreaming and moving down streets in sleep like a dog dreaming and twitching its limbs through a dream park. Slipping in and out of consciousness. The stream of consciousness interrupted by sleep or a collapse into unconsciousness. Driving around Sao Paulo at 4am sliding in and out of jetlagged stupor, images of broad avenues, high architecture, topless prostitutes flickering through indistinguishable reality or dream.

Deciding. Deciding where to draw the line. If the Optik performers stop moving they must decide when to move again. What is the genesis of movement? *The precise moment that is the origin of action, the impulse to movement. It is a key point of transition between two polar states of performing, between the desire to move and the desire to rest, between energy conservation and the expenditure of energy* (Edwards, 2003). The

performers try to strip away the usual factors involved in deciding about moving – habit, patterns, aesthetic, rhythm. They try to respond ‘unconsciously’ – with reflex, urges, temptations, responses, mirroring, entrainment, trajectory, proximity. Everyday interactions, movements and decisions are amplified. *I started working with intuitive performer actions I moved into ... elemental areas, just working with people, in space, in time.... But being simple is not at all easy.... Engagement in action is a matter of decision, to move or not to move, continuum of potential moments. In this dynamic arena, which is an inner space, the performer can attempt to wait. At this liminal waiting moment, which is a simultaneous experience of movement potential and rest the body appears, not as an image but as an immediate and felt presence* (Edwards, 2003).

Waiting. Waiting for a sense of when to move and what to do. The performer is both stopping and moving, both the still centre of experience and the origin of action. *When exploring the next moment, the performer is also in the present moment (of action). The performer must not leave the present action to anticipate some future one the performer must transform one action (the present one) into another one (the next one)* (Edwards, 2003). There is an anxiety of the actions of others in relation to yourself, an anxiety of stasis, a pressure from spectators to act, to resolve the tension of waiting with action. The performers patiently hold emptiness and inaction, waiting. The difficulty of not jay-walking. In Germany or Finland where you should wait for the lights to change before crossing the road. The difficulty of continuing to wait when there is no perceived physical reason not to move, only cultural consent. The difficulty is not so much fear of legal consequence or cultural disapproval. The difficulty is that moving and bodily actions are on the cusp between entirely unconscious somatic actions – the heart beating, the lungs breathing, the stomach digesting – and potential actions that arrive in the conscious mind requiring attention – thought and decision. When we live in a city our navigation of other people, obstacles, routes and traffic becomes a bodily habituation. After practice this moving sinks out of consciously directed action and into the body, into reflex. The body runs on its own well-worn grooves and ruts.

The Optik performances make emotions, moods, body chemistry, visible. In the dance studio the relationship between space and performer is stark – there are four walls, the floor, the ceiling, the lighting, sounds, other moving bodies. In Kompanhia Theatre Optik transgress spatial conventions – they go through doorways, they disappear from view but their footsteps can still be heard, performing invisibly. A performer sits next to a woman in the audience and stares neutrally. She stares back, laughs, breaks away from the stare, reconnects, laughs. The performer waits patiently. *Am I an actor? A dancer? An object? Or just a projected image? Or shadow? Standing in front of an audience of strangers, of inquisitive/smiling or confused/angry faces? Seeking contact, connection (and disconnection) with other people. It seems like possibilities are endless. When asked what I do in Optik I do not know! I am there, looking for something, some moment, for the audience and myself* (Simon Humm, Optik performer cited in Edwards, 2003). The performers' images travel down a phone line and are performing simultaneously on a screen in London and reappearing re-represented, well travelled, fuzzy at the edges on a screen in Sao Paulo that they sometimes halt in front of and watch. A commodius vicus of recirculation. Listening. They are performing to live music being relayed down the phone line from London, the image of the musician flickering on a screen. The sound is intermittent and uneven as it travels down the dodgy internet connection. The performers, electronic sound and image, are flowing round the space, round the audience, round each other, round the world.

Walking. Optik perform in Praca de Se, Sao Paulo – a vast crowded busy open rectangle in front of the steps of the high Cathedral. The three performers walk and run and stand along their lines carving a performance in the gulf and confusion of this street space. People go about their business, walking momentarily with ladders, buckets, pushchairs or briefcases alongside or through the performance – real life intersecting with art. Or the people form into curves of audience, moving and meandering along the invisible frame that is created around the performance. Hot, heavy air moves around us all, almost visible. *Being about energy I have chosen to work in parts of the world where energy (from people) is abundant and freely shared or given; former Soviet countries, as well as North Africa and Brazil. We give back, but also crucially tap in to that energy (which*

sometimes seems lacking in the UK performance scene) (Edwards, 2003). After the workshops of Optik lines we are given gifts by our Brazilian hosts. In Sao Paulo we are given and join a circling dance. In Campinas we join a Capoeira masterclass and at the end of the class we stand in a tight ring shoulder to shoulder with the Master soothing us, closing our eyes, leaning my whole body weight in trust against my left neighbour as my right neighbour leans theirs on me. Ringsome.

Stopping. The full stop. Optik must eventually stop performing although there is no particular reason to do so. Going on a journey we try to 'finish everything' before we go. Writing to a dead-line. I must eventually stop chipping at potential realities, stop thinking, reading, writing and complete, finish, close. End. Start. Life,