

Hertz

Review by Björn Säfsten, September 2013

We are waiting in the foyer of Dansens Hus in Stockholm to experience **Hertz**, the new creation of Sidney Leoni, and we already know there we are already part of a fictional dispositive. All lights of the theatre building are turned off; only few candle lights around and a silent audience. In a corridor next to the stage, we are told to wait; we get introduced to 2 guides who will bring us into the space. We are told to keep contact with the one in front of us and if we want to leave, the guides with a small red light on their back will help us out. At this point I don't know that the space will be stronger than me and that the experience will ask me to surrender. It will in a surprising way; it will make me question myself rather than the performance itself.

Hertz gives me a new body awareness, a tactile experience that questions and enhances my senses. I am guided through a dark space where I can only hold the person in front of me and trust the guide's knowledge of directions; then I am led to a seat where I am about to experience something that dance often attempts to do but rarely manages to challenge and encounter its audience. I am seated listening, watching, feeling and sensing loud sounds, vibrations, darkness, lights, shadow appearances and air streams. I am captivated. I get challenged in my physical way of thinking. It is like a phenomenological concept but in practice. It does so by producing affect and sensory affections within an immersive and immaterial choreography made out of light, sound and air movements.

I am many times not sure what my body creates and what is actually created by the performers. Through the play with darkness and minimum light intensities, I start to question the very function of my gaze. I am not sure if it is because my eyes can't focus that I create shades that starts to move, or if this is actually light that I see. At other points I get a strong tactile lonely feeling where I hide in my own body. It is close to a tactile anxiety without the emotion, but with a strong physical recognition. I start looking around the people sitting close to me. They seem to be completely still, I can't see their faces and that makes me even lonelier. Even the guides seated still, in a concentrated way, make me wonder if they will actually guide me out if I needed to. I look up; I can see a dimmed red light, at least something that gives me a guideline. I start doubting what is to be trusted. I am having a full body experience that challenges several questions:

Can we trust our senses? How do we know what is outside the body? Where are the borders between our body and the space around us? Do the person next to me experience the world like I do? Are we here together or am I completely alone in my experience? The work creates this in a subtle yet sublime way. I know I felt, heard, saw something, but was it my imagination or this something made in this staged environment?

My understanding of my experience also feeds of a variety of notable images that draws my interpretation. There are plenty of actions and images that I recognize as fictional situations and spaces or as cultural references like industrial workspace, sci-fi lighting, zombies' body, or just as impressions of material or objects like metal, dust, fog or darkness. Many of which seems to belong to collective situations of violence, oppression and obedience. At other moments, my body is left in a place of deep silence and calmness. At one point I recognize the feeling of watching a night sky laying down watching airplanes passing by. Although I am tempted to identify my experience to these situations, the work does not seem to want to create a narrative or to unfold the political within these images. It rather creates a space where my attention constantly bounces between the experience and I. For me, this attention of the outside, the spatial, creates this very specific focus on my own body and its relationship to the world. It is not theatrical, but serves more as an impulse of attention, an understanding, where in this experience the language of images is subordinate to the exploration of my senses.

I understand that **Hertz** works from a number of concepts that are set into motion, but as an audience member I don't feel that I need to trace them or to understand them. I am experiencing them and more than experiencing I start to challenge my impressions. It rarely happens nowadays that I get to see a choreographic work where I am in no need of grasping the full intellectual depth to understand the work. In **Hertz** this isn't needed and although I am all up for an intellectual discourse bending, it feels refreshing that a work proposes knowledge production via a sensorial experience, rather than an intelligible one. A knowledge production that still makes me think, perhaps not in line with the thoughts of the performers, but in relation to my experience.