

Power, Vulnerability, Risk-taking

Femmes @ Dixon Place, November 17th 2012

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Femmes was an evening where desires to move and express were juxtaposed, with great intelligence and clarity, to the deconstruction of stereotypes, predictable narratives, and expectations. Meanings were presented and questioned through gesture, image and powerful movement. The evening opened space for inquiry into the relationships between the embodiment, cultural unconscious, and informed observation.

The first piece on the program was evocatively entitled *A Piece of Meat Stuck in My Throat*. Michal Samama works on the edge between performance art and dance-theater. The work presents a highly structured series of poetic images dealing with feminine form, production of desire, and endurance. Bodily contortion, especially the stretched mouth with fingers stuck in the body orifice, can be read as a comment on apparatuses of representation of the female form in the consumerist society. Objects that enter the performative space extending into the audience – body itself, high heels, orange kept in between the overstretched mouth and offered to audience, and a flashlight used to light surfaces and cavities of the body, offer a place for projections, and reflection on the personal reactivity, identification, and displacements within the “society of spectacle”. Mezzo Soprano voice of Inbal Hever gives sound to the silenced beauty of Samama’s deliberate gesture. The relationship of two female figures in space is complicated through doubling, exchange of role, and precise mirror-like awareness.

The second piece on the program, *Suspending and Other Tricks Draft 4*, created and performed by Karen Bernard, engendered the space where recognizable cinematic scenarios were fragmented, and imbued with irony. Scenarios linked to the mystical projections onto both femininity and androgynous body of a dancer, sensuality of a performing body, and drama of a solo performer were faithfully re-enacted. These familiar narrative references appeared in a unique theatrical settings; in a relationship to the costume: black dress with thin straps, layers of laced panties, and a heavy, black cloak; to an object: coffin-like box, and to the projection of an arched window in the background. By evoking familiar associations in the audience, Bernard affirmed the presence of an experienced artist/performer in a public space. Her authoritative shaping of gestures, positions, and choreographed situations allowed for poignant de-mystification of the seen through the explanatory speech acts. Dramatic intervals between the particular actions – specifically, taking layers of underwear down, rocking in the seated position while straddling a coffin-like-box, rolling on the ground half-naked, and purposeful repetitions of these actions, allowed for social anxieties to surface as it invoked familiar binaries: inside/outside, down/up, obvious/hidden, humorous/tragic, deliberate/causal and ineffable/highly articulated. Cinematic setting emphasized nuances of the expressive gesture, making elements of parody gain potentials for interpretative layering of existential paradoxes.

The last piece on the program, Rebecca Patek's *2 ge(a)ther we are w/hole*, was a powerful piece about the right to embodiment through movement, and politics of learning together. The piece begins with explanation of a performative situation. One dancer is talking, while the other is seated in the wheelchair showing gestural signs that invoke visual representations of impatience, desire to move, listening actively, participating in the speech and/or preparing for upcoming virtuosic act of aerial acrobatics. Language creates a ground for the piece. It is full of intentional euphemisms. It embarrasses the audience as it seeks to unravel experiences that are often left to silence. It is humorously self-reflexive. Disability as a thematic focus of the piece, transforms into a conceptual field informing public discourse rather than becoming solid experienced reality with predictable signification. It becomes something to talk about and, also, move around, even when encountering cultural impasses. The effort, the pain and the strength required to perform are implied in transitions, and accentuated through embodying preconceived tasks. After an extended prelude, the dancer in the wheelchair, Erin Clark, climbs up the hanging fabric and fearlessly explores movement that defies gravity. The video collage in the background serves as a reminder of a complex cultural context. Patek's movement challenges limits of personal *kinesphere*, extending to embrace periphery without bypassing feelings of the core, staying intentionally bound to the spatial givens. We witness realities of the bodies desiring to move, affectively responding to the systems of categorization.

Marija Krtolica writes about performance, and has been presenting her movement-based work nationally and internationally since early 90s. She holds MA in Performance Studies from NYU, and MFA from UC Davis. (www.marijakrtolica.com)