

Imagining a Third Space

Daniel Linehan, choreographer

Throughout the collaboration with Stefan, we have been continually asking (and intentionally not resolving) the question of what is the “third” space. It is definitely a non-binary space. It is a space beyond the binary of live presence and mediated presence—we allow both to co-exist. It is a space beyond the binary of dance and music—we blur the boundaries between the two forms. And it is also a space beyond the binary of public and private—we aim to create a public space that still allows for the possibility of a private encounter with an individual performer.

The paradox of working with the idea of private matters in performance is that performance is the very space of sharing, a space of making-public. There is a certain impossibility in the attempt to display or reveal the private. To reveal what is private is to transform it into something public. The tension between the idea of “private matters” and the public presentation of a performance was a very enriching tension for my choreographic process, pushing me to make choices I would not have made otherwise. In one part of the performance I ask the dancers to put on an imaginary mask that makes public their internal emotional state. The permission to put on a mask—to put on a grotesque outward expression—allows the dancers to access emotions that would otherwise not be easy to share in ordinary polite society. So the idea of a public mask helps make it possible to share a private, almost un-shareable emotion.

Our aim of blurring the boundaries between dance and music also pushed me into new choreographic terrain. I began to understand Stefan’s music as essentially infusing the space of the theater with multiple levels of vibration. I began to wonder if the dance could extend this vibration, adding layers of bodily vibration which would interweave with the musical vibrations. I essentially created a choreography in which vibration never ceases, in which vibrations are channeled and manifested in different ways through the bodies of the dancers. These small and large vibrations tend to bring out a tender vulnerability in the dancers. Something private in the dancers is being shaken to the surface.

The music seems to energetically activate the space, and so I thought about how the dance could also draw attention to the spaces between—the spaces between the dancers, the musicians, and the audience—rather than thinking only about the bodies of the dancers and their movements. Can the dance, like the music, also create an actively charged and vibrating space? Can the dance create a shimmering environment in the room? Can we invite the audience to give attention to the spaces between performers and non-performers, invite them to see the *space between* as an additional performing partner? The dancers engage in specific gestures that frame the space between them, and they work to establish long-distance connections from one side of the hall to the other. At times, the dancers also move as if there are currents in the room that are moving their bodies, and in this way the surrounding space seems to become an active player in the choreography.

Using live video cameras to capture some of the movements of the performers creates different possibilities of perception for the audience. You are invited to see tiny vibrations of the body that would normally be impossible to perceive in a large-scale stage production. The physical proximity between the performers and the audience also allows for new possible ways to experience the performance. You can at times perceive the performance through touch or through smell, or by feeling the wind the dancers create as they pass by, or the vibrations they create when they shake their bodies next to your seat. The music also intrudes on the private space of the audience, when the low frequencies start to vibrate your internal organs. In the end, the private matters are not those that performers reveal to the spectators, but rather they are matters that shake the bodies of everyone in the room, performers and audience alike. That which is fundamentally private—one's own experience of one's body—becomes an experience that everyone in the room gives more attention to. In this space of shared attention to one's embodied experience, the line between the private and the public begins to blur.

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