

SEAD – Judson Revisited Lab

Review by Fernanda Ermelindo Rodrigues

5 students, 3 MA choreography and 2 undergrads with a major in choreography, have shown the results of the Judson Revisited Laboratory on 29.10.24, at the Josef Echart Theater, at SEAD. Four pieces/scores were shown, all created in collaboration with the dancers performing each piece.

I was the last person to enter the Josef Echart Theater, at the end of a long line of SEAD students. As I crossed the door, the performance had already begun – here the first recognizable element calling back to Judson Church. While about 2/3 of the audience took a seat in one the designated audience chairs, the other third sat on the floor surrounding the performance space – here the second Judson resemblance.

“Repetition, accumulation, how objects can change the space” – these were the three ideas the creator of the first score drew from Trisha Brown. The main goal was to bring these ideas together with the dancers’ own backgrounds and realities. A big rope on the floor serving as a simple and effective tool to change the space as much as one would want to, a three-dimensional audience shifting the performers’ gazes and fronts into all directions, no disparity from audience and performative space, repetitive movements and what seemed like short choreographic phrases, ordinary tasks such as walking, laughing, jumping, screaming.

A quick change in the room: while the MA Student responsible for the first score spoke briefly about it, the dancers left the stage with their objects, all observers moved to the audience chairs and new performers entered the stage.

Amber dim lights, 7 performers on stage on chairs and on mattresses and lying on the floor, quietly, in complete opposition to the extremely agitate first piece. The 7 slowly begin to join each other on a sort of mantra echoing through the theater, eyes closed as if in deep relaxation. The harmonious chanting is now being interrupted here and there by animal-like noises – birds chirping, small monkeys, canine barking – perhaps just my association to the sounds coming from the performers’ mouths. Their movements intensifying with the increasing loudness and strength of the sounds, without ever breaking the deep trance they seemed to be collectively in. This is a voice score inspired by Meredith Monk and her futuristic folk. The 2 students who came up with this piece based themselves on Monk’s use of voice with the idea of creating a

dance choir which, in their words, wasn't yet achieved. I, however, kindly disagree. The voices were most certainly leading to body movement and behaving as maestros to a physical choir. According to the creators, the fixed vocal score was established after a process that began with improvisation. "There is a fire in my heart..." – they sing repeatedly – "...and it's not far away".

Inspired by Deborah Hay, the third score took on Judson Church's ideal of bringing daily activities into the performance. And they took it further by using today's technology. All 5 performers used their smartphone cameras to feed a live video in the theater where we could watch them running their daily activities: peeing, showering, having a coffee and a smoke, going for a run... Here we witness the ingenious way these young dancers brought some of the ideas from the 1960s into 2024.

The 4th and last piece of the afternoon plays with another aspect of repetition: the same movement phrase being repeated several times – really several, I can't even guess how many. For the soundtrack a sort of metronome which was at first sounding at every second. Each sound a count in the movement phrase, being presented very clear, clean and sharp. The metronome began to increasingly speed up, forcing the dancers to speed up as well. Their sport clothing and sport shoes making more and more sense as they rushed to try and keep up with the metronome. One dancer paused, recuperated, started again. And now another one paused, started again. And another...When the metronome reached the fastest rhythm, it began to slowly decrease its tempo, allowing the dancers to also slow down. We could now see again the sharp, clean movements of now extremely exhausted bodies. "Last one" announces the creator of this score from the back of the theater, bringing the expression of relief to every dancer's face and laughter from the audience. The inspiration here was the minimalistic movements mixed with complex transitions of Lucinda Childs.

And so, after approximately one hour, the afternoon performance came to an end. The four scores represented so clearly the characteristics of Judson Church Theater that I believe even without knowing this afternoon was the result of the Judson Church Revisited lab, one could identify the inspiration behind the scores. Ultimately, it was a great delight seeing the most virtuoso dance students from SEAD taking their chance with the avant-garde experimental ideas from the creators of Judson Church, who sought to question – and at times deny – technique, virtuosity, spectacularity, along other aspects of what was known until the 1960s as stage dance.