

Pole Reports from Space – Claire Croizé & Etienne Guilloteau / ECCE

The piece begins in silence. Justyna Kalbarczyk, one of two dancers on stage, holds out her right hand, fingers spread, as if conjuring something, or performing a reading. The gesture refers to a picture of Krzysztof Wodiczko, recording sounds in the streets of Warsaw through devices attached to his hands, as part of an art performance in 1972. The political power of this image becomes clear when set against the background of Poland in the 70s and 80s, during the soviet era: a time when subversive opinions were censored or repressed, and listening was pretty much all you were allowed to do.

Pole reports from space takes us back to this time with the sounds of the Polish Radio Experimental Studio, a pioneering hub for electronic music that had its heyday between the 1960s and 1980s. Here, composers such as Eugeniusz Rudnik, Elzbieta Sikora and Tomasz Sikorski created daring and visionary electronic music, right under the nose of the communist regime. That is exactly what fascinates the choreographers of this piece, Brussels-based duo Etienne Guilloteau and Claire Croizé: on the one hand, these composers who were working in relative isolation, closed off from information and resources, yet on the other hand, managing to convey covert subversive messages through their music. The title of the piece refers to a composition by Rudnik, which uses recordings of messages sent home by kosmonauts in a mesmerizing soundscape. Although this track itself is not part of the performance, its themes are very much central to the piece.

Pole reports from space draws the audience into a retro-futurist dreamscape, a nod to the sci-fi movies that PRES provided with soundtracks. The first impression is that of a soviet rave party, complete with industrial lighting and a neon-colored costume for Justyna. The second dancer, Krystyna Lama Szydłowska, is dressed head to toe in silver, with a large hood that covers her entire face during the first quarter of the piece. This, together with the bulging backpack hanging from her shoulders, gives her a grotesque silhouette, reminiscent both of a space traveller and an extra-terrestrial creature.

They move carefully at first, with closed eyes and gentle, delicate hand gestures, feeling their way through the auditory landscape of Tomasz Sikorski's *Solitude of Sounds for tape*. Their trajectory through the performance space is led by the travelling sound. As the music grows in intensity, their movements become larger, and more frantic. It feels as if they turn their inward gaze out towards us, trying to grab our attention, spelling out their message with their bodies. In this way, *Pole reports from space* exposes the mechanics of choreography, how meaning is encoded for and decoded by the audience through movement. And when Lama takes off her backpack and starts scribbling in a notebook, this theme becomes part of the code itself.

The two dancers rarely cross paths. Their divergence is emphasized through the spaces they explore with their bodies. Justyna's movements have an organic quality: birdlike, she hops and flutters around, arms waving like branches on a tree. These gestures lead into the second track, Rudnik's *Epitaph of Stones*, which uses recordings of pebbles, clicking and tapping against a hard surface – making this song perhaps the best example of how remote PRES still was from the digital age, relying heavily on analog techniques. At this point Lama, in contrast, moves in ways that are almost mechanical, like a satellite looking for a signal somewhere far beyond.

Eventually, the dancers lend their voices as well as their bodies to this dialectic: Lama chants a lullaby that speaks of "new worlds in the sky", while Justyna sings lines from Cesare Pavese's *Dialogues with Leucò*, that refer to a mythological, untamed natural landscape. Of

course, these texts already existed within the choreography, since the dancers use them as inspiration and building blocks for their movement. There is a certain poeticality in the way that these rigid, text-based sequences of gestures alternate with the free-flowing, open stream of movement at the core of the piece.

All these elements – movement, text, but also, in a more literal sense, the amorphous objects that Lama carries in her backpack and that are later distributed across the stage – help to fill out the landscape of the piece. It is a landscape that unites a vision of the future as seen from the past, optimistic and unapologetic, with future visions based on our rapidly disappearing present. Moving toward our future, the world as we know it starts to exist only in our memory. However, the conclusion of *Pole Reports from Space* remains open, much like its final image: two travellers moving slowly in two directions at once.