

Day In/Day Out (2004)

What is the relationship between the modern disciplinary societies, and the 'societies of control' which we supposedly live in today? How might this relationship be relevant to the practice of theater/dance/performance, whose institutions maintain a double identity of both tradition and the desire to produce new and relevant individualities?

The individual, according to Michel Foucault, is a modern notion which was developed via the notion of the 'dividual'. In works like Discipline and Punish, Foucault outlines how identification and separation are the primary means of instituting power. Disciplinary regimes- the asylum, the school, the prison- must identify and categorize individuals in order to control them. But as Foucault illustrates, power in the modern disciplinary age needed to become productive- so not only what would break bodies into submission, but what would organize them into a particular form of production. In order to achieve this, Foucault conceptualizes the method of 'docility' in which an institution treats the subject's body with "subtle coercion...of (the subject's) movements, gestures, attitudes: an infinitesimal power over the active body." (DP, 137)

Ballet is of course a fantastic example of the disciplinary regime. First, it is a docile body which must be achieved by the ballet dancer who must be flexible and able to pick up minute movements quickly; she must not arrive at the beginning of her training with background in other disciplines, this would only interfere. She must be a sort of blank slate which absorbs the an 'infinitesimal power' over her body. What do we say of the contemporary dancer, who is no longer expected to achieve an ideal body, but a body that has passed through the disciplinary regimes of 'dance training' in order to express with it a new individuality?

Foucault's later work began to approach his notion of 'bio-power' in which the inside/outside relationship between the subject and the centers of power which controlled the use of his body became increasingly internalized, and where subjects in binding themselves to an identity, become increasingly tied to an external power. How does the contemporary subject bind himself to his own forms of training and for what ends? How does the model of the prison, the disciplinary space of enclosure par excellence relate to the 'non,' or 'out' space of open control without end? How is this figure of the prison escapee who makes the break from a space of enclosure into the limitless space of idealized freedom, a romantic figure that allows us to imagine another regime with an 'outside' to escape to.

Our question beginning the piece was, how does the institution in which we operate-a dance school- place us at a nexus between disciplinary and control models. The first scene of the piece is staged as a prisoner line-up, but doubles as an audition. In the line-up, the 'guilty' are identified, in the audition the 'promising' are identified. Each wear a number, and in both cases, the selected enter an institution. Of course we are not forced to go to dance school, nor is it a form of punishment- and this was part of our interest. How different are the operations which choose and discipline an individual by use of authority and those which the individual chooses by use of his free will. The second section of the piece doubles between a strip search and a physical examination. Upon entering the institution, it must be investigated what the body possesses and what it is capable of. The strip-search is comically a search for 'absolute knowledge' over all of the body. The order of the report is essential to the institutionalization-voluntary or otherwise- of individuals, here we submit ourselves to all of the movements which an examining body would demand of us, only, there is no examining body. In the second section it is already unclear whether we are being submitted to, or are submitting ourselves to this examination.

The practice of dance is perhaps the strongest hold in the arts of both discipline and individualization. The contemporary dancer must train himself to be his own master- he must internalize the authority of the instructor in order to discipline his body to produce from the techniques of ideal bodies, a 'purely individual' body. It was interesting here to find a correlation

between this and the use of the 'workshop' found in most correctional facilities. In prisons, the workshop serves as a space for busy manual work, the idea being that a working body will teach itself to be useful, and that the 'correction' will come from an internalization of the notion of hard work.

In the prison yard we plan our escape using the dance 'language' we have learned. The question comically becomes, what are the 'moves' that our escape plan consists of, how is the plan a choreography itself literally and figuratively and what is the power, in fact, for dance language to communicate? This absurd gesture suggests that these are the tools which we have as dancers to plan our 'escape' to the outside, and here we make fun of the poverty of our training to translate into a communicative tool for 'making it.'

It's the spotlight of the 'film' which provides a window to the outside for the inmates. After seeing *The Sound of Music* the first and second prison attempts are made. Film is on the outside but it is another inside, another system which is enclosed and produces its own narratives of escape, freedom, lines of flight.

In our final escape it is this inside on the outside to which we escape: from prisoners of the theater to subjects bound to their fictitious identities, from bodies that look only for a way 'out' to bodies tied to their pursuit of ways 'in'. Inside-out and still somehow imprisoned, cynically, sarcastically, and light-heartedly, we laugh at ourselves and at the discourses around us that are still so fascinated with the concept of Freedom.

Written by Andros Zins-Browne June, 2004