

NOTHING IN OUR WAY

By Emilyn Claid

I'm sitting in a small, South London studio theatre watching *No Title*, a piece made and performed by Mette Edvardsen (2014). She walks on stage wearing a faded T-shirt, jeans and trainers. She stands centre stage, removes her trainers and closes her eyes. Facing us, she begins a monologue she maintains throughout the piece.

The beginning is gone. The space is empty and gone. The prompter has turned off his reading lamp and gone ... Walls, other walls, a door opening and closing, gone. The ceiling gone. Lamps and speakers hanging, shadows moving in silence, gone. One leg and one arm, gone. One, two, and eight, gone. Hidden cables, power supply, black out, green emergency exit lights, gone. The corners of the room are gone. The foreground and background gone. Me not gone, not sleeping, not done, not gone. Layers of paint, holes in the wall and marks on the floor, what this space has told you already, gone. Fire extinguisher, people sitting in the dark, and the sound of rain, gone. Lipstick, chewing gum, wallets and mobile phone switched off, minute earlier, one year later, gone. Microphone stand, gone. The backdrop and the curtains are gone ... tables, chairs, plants, gone. (Edvardsen 2014)

She walks slowly around the space several times with her eyes still closed, then returns to face her audience.

Walking in circles, gone. Counting to one hundred gone ... closeness gone. Things turning out exactly as planned, gone. (Edvardsen 2014)

She walks to the back of the stage, scrabbles for a piece of white chalk and – with her eyes still closed – draws a line from the back to the front of the stage. She then crawls back upstage, rubbing the line out as she goes, but missing much of it without the use of her eyes. 'Line gone', she says, and walks back downstage.

Distinction between thinking and doing has gone. Distinction has gone. Between has gone. Details are gone. The thing I wanted to say is gone. Things that do not speak are gone. Things we are unable to speak about are gone. (Edvardsen 2014)

She then takes stick-on representations of open eyes from her shoes and attaches them to her eyelids.

Not looking, not not looking, not not wearing glasses, not not better like this, not not staring, not not looking back, not not looking another way, I was not here, I was not gone, the beginning of time is gone. The ice age is gone. The stone age is gone. (Edvardsen 2014)

At the end of the piece, she finds her shoes and puts them on. She walks to a side wall, takes off the fake eyes and sticks them on the wall. She walks back to centre stage, opens her eyes, and her final words are 'Darkness gone' (Edvardsen 2014).

Mette works within the context of European post-dance, a community of artists who share a disillusion with dance production and spectacle, a community united by the exhaustion of its members at meeting Western, neoliberal, production market demands. Dance need not be a primarily visual art form, she says, but can concern itself with 'how senses are working together' (Edvardsen 2017: 217). She does very little on stage; her curiosity is engaged by what else might be present beside her image, by what else might be imagined or shared between herself and her audience.

Mette's rejection of theatrical magic, spectacle, desires to please, dramatic expression and dancing or dance codes allows me to sense her presence in performance and a vulnerability that is both hers and mine. Her attention to the 'gone-ness' of material things, means neither of us can hide behind anything and I feel immersed in emptiness of affect. An existential nothingness pervades. Yet this is not despair, I am not standing on the edge of a cliff or sinking into depression. This is like a fresh start. Exhilaration appears with the dawning sense that being alive is simply a clarity of perception, an affirmation of presence, a beginning, a relief.

Mette's text strips everything relentlessly away, while providing clarity on what remains. As she notes in the program, '*No Title* is a writing in space, a writing that is both

additive and subtractive. It is a writing that traces and erases, that moves and halts, that looks at things that are not there and recovers that which is instead' (Edwardsen 2014). She utters the final words 'darkness gone' when she opens her eyes and catches the light. The clutter of life, the detritus of assumptions, have fallen away which allows me to see her anew. Looking at her looking back at me, brings a piercing sense of the fragility of human connection, vulnerably exposed. Nothing in our way.

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