

Interview with Moriah Evans

–7 February 2017, Minneapolis

Sandra Teitge:

Tell me a little bit about the piece *Be my Muse*. What was the motivation and inspiration behind it?

Moriah Evans:

There were a few factors. The last two works I made were pretty large group pieces for an artist at my level, five and then six people. They are called *Social Dance 1-8: Index* and *Social Dance 9-12: Encounter* and they were dealing with relational questions in the act of performing, one in a very strict minimalist code, and the other more in expressionistic paradigms in relation to the history of dance. After spending all this time, two years, during which I used my body as a tool for other people to experience themselves in a way that I was asking them to experience themselves, like on stage or in front of other people, as well as constantly giving feedback or directing people I was interested in starting a process asking the performers speak about me. The summer of 2016, (...) before I went away to Brussels to do a residency at the Villa Empain, I did interviews with all the performers. They spent too many hours hearing me tell them how I want them to look or in what state ... I was curious to turn the lens from their persecutive back onto myself. That started as a process to look at my process and the process of making, relational habits inside of the act of making work. So I recorded all these interviews and transcribed them, trying to look at some kind of artefact of myself. After that, I sent out a request to people who have ever been in my work or had been closely affiliated with a piece, a visual art collaborator, for example. I asked them to describe what I look like to them. I also told them to not be too nice. I am interested in the criticality of myself, how I am, in my habits of making. I'm right now interested in wanting the means of production to be criticised in the act of making something, not critiqued through science or reference but through enactment or structure. I handled all the information confidentially, of course. I took some quotes from the inner muse, things I found provocative, things I had written down in my notebook. –These are the beginnings of “Be my Muse.”

Then I had a residence at the invitation of Asad Raza at the Villa Empain in Belgium inside of this set, a curated show, including works by Pierre Huygue, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Daniel Buren and others, where I developed all these ideas further.

I also used early staples of how I usually develop work, such as using seven minutes as a time period for the expiration of an idea. I think seven minutes is a good amount of time before people get bored, enough time to loose yourself and to get into an idea. I'm using the seven-minute-experiment whenever I try out a new idea. That's where the structure of the piece (7-14-21 minutes) comes from.

I took these artefacts from previous practices and recombined them into some kind of portrait of material that interest me.

The speaking and dancing idea came from Asad Raza, the curator at Villa Empain, and his suggestion to try it out. I was interested in producing a friendship between a person and myself that may or may not be a stranger to me. I always insist on the relational nature of dance as a practice, the collaborative habits that are inherent to the form despite the apparatus that structures the marketplace and labels people and assigns roles and is everything. There is an intense exchange when intimacy happens. My question was whether I could do that inside of a piece with anybody. How do I expose myself and get someone else to expose him- or herself inside of a room?

Experiencing time and space together in a way.

ST: What is satisfactory to you at the Villa Empain? Did it work for you?

ME: Yes, I like the structure of the piece. It's a structure improvisation. It's important that people are allowed to choose the room. The early seven minutes are choreographed, they change according to the room. (...)

ST: Could you talk about the topics you mention during the performance?

MR: Right now, I'm focusing on organ donation. I'm fascinated by it but I'm not focusing on the medical and legal complicated ethics surrounding organ donation. I think it's more of a tool in terms of thinking about an ecosystem of relationships between people, and boundaries between private and public, intimate space and public space, creating performance structures that enable a simultaneous display of a private gaze and a public gaze, private and public self and how these things move. They are never in a simple space; they are like labels. The organ donation is a good tool for the kind of proximity that people have to my body, to how they may or may not look at my body, to the movements I do, some of which are more aesthetically pleasing, appealing and easy and gratifying to watch, others, which are coded in a more abject way, a more difficult or disobedient body. I feel like it's a topic that gets people to locate their own flesh in a conversation, jumps in to big questions, philosophical questions between material and immaterial issues of body versus spirit or: "Is a personality contained in the flesh?" or "Who owns our body? Who regulates them and what part makes this or that?" and so on. The questions surrounding organ donations, how is it regulated by society and how could we have a casual conversation about it, not as experts or people who have not experienced an organ donation, are interesting to me.

ST: Have people surprised you in past encounters, in a way that they reacted?

ME: People surprise me for sure. I take notes. It is very sincere in this way. Even though I have my little toolkit and there is some manipulation going on and sometimes I will scream at somebody and they will be taken aback and then I flip the scenario. I have my strategies that are sort of provocative. I have worked on my strategies; it's a process. It's a performative understanding of practice. It comes from years of critiquing the exhibitionism involved in performance and the questions of a performer, such as "Who do I perform for? For the audience? For myself? How much vanity is involved? How much generosity? How much occupation of their time? Why occupy their time with yourself?"

These are things that I'm busy in relationship to other choreographic practices. *Be my Muse* was a site where I could deal with some of these things. I wanted to create an open structure that can contain different things, in which I can put different people into a relationship with myself, as well as, a different way of watching inside of an institutional frame that is inhabited and occupied in a certain space for a conversation and a politics of engagement between two people.

ST: The notion of "wasting time" that you mention in the piece, is this something you are busy with in general in your life and practice? Are you reflecting on it on a meta-level? Or are you using it more as a provocation in the context of your piece?

ME: I'm using it more as a provocation. The person is responsible for the time. They control the timer. It is structural in relation to the piece, the kind of way in which the person is witnessing the performance but also becomes in charge of it. A lot of my activity is determined by how they –the audience– are, whether they know that or not. I think they assume that they are less important to me than they are. Time is structural but also

essential. It's like when you are in elementary school and you are having your friend over to your house for the first time. You experience time and space together for the first time in a new way. Such moment has an urgency for exchange; you don't want time to run out but it does. *Be my Muse* is structured in relationship to duration and what can get done and unpacked and shared between two people and the 49 minutes leave you with wanting more time.

[As a bigger project in relationship to time, obviously choreography is big about time and how to use time and codes of time; there are many formal conversations about time.]