

Evening programme OUT OF MIND

feels like pouring, feels like well informed compost, feels like wetness, feels like without qualities, feels like a discrepancy, feels like fascinating jelly, feels like a decomposition island, feels like air flows, feels like a projection, feels like spilling, feels like a repetition

Questions by Julia Schade and Bettina Knaup, editing by Bettina Knaup.

You did a lot of research about the brain, neurons and the nervous system. What interested you in these neuroscientific approaches and how did you work with them?

Eva Meyer Keller: *Out of Mind* is part of a series, which engages with different fields of science, such as physics, biology and neuroscience. After engaging with the atom, with cells and cell division I was interested in looking at how cells communicate with each other, how they signal and sense and how the nervous system developed evolutionarily. Neuroscientists assume that the nervous system has evolved independently multiple times and that some organisms have an entirely different nervous system to us humans. How do they see and feel the world and themselves? We also read the book by the neuroscientist Lisa Feldmann Barrett, *How Emotions are Made*, in which she elaborates that what we sense and feel is a construction or even a hallucination, constrained by the world and the body but ultimately constructed by the brain. We get a sensation - e.g. light from a lamp reaches the retina, a door being slammed makes sound waves moving our ear drum - but we don't see or hear yet, to see or hear our brain needs to make predictions to interpret the sensations, and these predictions are based on experiences which we have accumulated in life (we have seen lamps and doors before). If the discrepancy between the basic sensation and the brain's prediction is very large, we need a lot of energy to figure this out and our brain tries to avoid using a lot of energy. Our brain therefore wants to know and tends to think its predictions are right ... this is how we are wired.

Our practice in rehearsals was to not take this for granted but rather become aware of how this happens and if we can develop a slightly different view on the world and on ourselves.

***Out of Mind* is a humid playground of gurgling fluids, misty clouds, reflecting water ponds: What is that water/air to you?**

Eva: My wish was not to make ungraspable things graspable, as I had done in previous works. This time I wanted the challenge to not grasp and to not understand. That's why we work with the medium of water and air/ breath. These are matters that are difficult to control, that you just cannot hold onto.

Annegret Schalke: We started this piece from within a cloud of thoughts that were somehow interconnected and somehow not. Making sense out of their relationship was part of the project. We worked with ungraspable matter like water, air, breath, also in order to open up a viewpoint/mindset on life that stresses interconnectedness, that thinks away boundaries between beings. Working with water I enjoy the spilling over of wetness into where it is not supposed to land.

Agata Siniarska: Working with materials that have their own agency and which choreograph me more than I choreograph them, is insanely fascinating: It opens the imagination to new spaces, expands it to new experiences.

Tamara Saphir: In the beginning of the process I had a vivid memory of a university epistemology teacher screaming “Nobody knows what a brain can do!”, an overexcited and slightly manic variation of the Spinoza quote “what can a body do?”. To account for the continuous or fluid nature of thinking and perceiving, it made a lot of sense to work with non-discrete, continuous matter like water and air.

There seems to be a strong dramaturgy of repetition: What relation is there between the ongoing scenes of looping and repeating and the implicit subject of the mind in the title?

Eva: I wanted to work with loops ... sometimes our thoughts go round and round. In the brain we have neural circuits, the neurons are interconnected by synapses and one neuron can have up to 10 000 connections. If you remember something, a neural circuit gets activated, one of the involved neurons triggers other neurons that are not directly involved in that circuit. So the circuits/loops transform, they are never exactly the same. Your memories travel and transform in the brain, also on a material level. In that sense, there are no repetitions. I wanted us to sense that, to notice loopy thoughts and to observe them transforming, for instance through a repetitive meditation practice.

Tamara: Meditation spilled in and out of the work. This time and space to pay attention to emerging and repeating patterns, or to the way different matters ripple, had a strong effect in my ways of seeing/being/paying attention in the world.

Annegret: Meditation is a powerful practice that makes you take one step out of your thinking body and observe your thoughts and feelings from the outside. Of course this “outside” perspective is an illusion, too, as we are always inside our bodies with our thoughts – a strange loop of looking at yourself looking at yourself looking at yourself... The fact of spending time with these observations can be grounding and unsettling at the same time. It can allow me to identify automated thought mechanisms and enable changes in the way of thinking. We developed a practice which we called “guided focus” - leading each other on journeys through words, that were giving focus to certain ways of thinking about breath and our bodies as “teams” of different kinds of cells and collaborating organisms - journeys of reconfiguring the “self”.

You have been working in this constellation for a while now. What are the most important aspects for you in this collective way of writing, exploring and performing?

Agata: We know each other so well that we can fully trust and support each other on stage and in the process. Working in this group is also a constellation of many friendships cultivated through artistic projects.

Eva: In the beginning of this performance, I had no idea of what it will look like... so we were on a journey of not knowing together, which is something not everyone is ready/willing to do. I am really grateful for that.

Tamara: Yes, something about this process was like leaving solid ground, letting go of certain things that we “had figured out” before. The trust I have in the know-how of this group made it less frightening to jump into unknown territories.

Annegret: The production of text has been a constant writing and rewriting by all of us, editing and sharpening our own and each other’s proposals. I really enjoyed the extended phases of learning that have accompanied our processes. The scenes came together through very open experimentation tasks from which Eva picked up what felt most relevant to her. A very generous and collaborative work proposal.