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Edinburgh Review: Autóctonos II at ZOO Southside

UNTIL 27TH AUGUST

Frustrating and mesmerising: Ben Kulvichit reviews a powerful physical study of uniformity and movement.

BEN KULVICHIT



Autóctonos II, choreographed by Ayelen Parolin. Photo: Joelle Bacchetta

Swivel from side to side, feet powdered to reduce friction against the white dance floor. Pivot on the balls of the feet, heels held off the ground. Arms slightly bent, at waist height.

Imagine this movement, repeated basically without variation, for half an hour, and you've imagined the first half of Ayelen Parolin's choreographic work. There are small variations – they might pivot at different speeds, find themselves facing the same way, travel across the stage, move away from each other and close in, but always keep equidistant from each other, always move in time. Change happens so slowly as to be almost unnoticeable, even down to Laurence Halloy's uber-restrained lighting design – a grid of PAR cans overhead fading up in groups of three or four, dimming in the last minutes to reveal the white, ghostly glare of LED footlights.

A prepared piano (a piano with objects inserted between the strings in order to alter the sound) plays a similarly

repetitive, intensely rhythmic score, full of syncopated hits and dull thuds. The dancers keep an internal rhythm, a mechanical propulsion which takes over their bodies, and we in the audience also feel this.

Of course, imagining something repeated for half an hour is not the same as actually watching it, and the magical thing about repetition is that it brings an audience onto a level with the performers. We know exactly what's coming, and we begin to predict the next movement – not cerebrally but in our own bodies. I begin to feel my shoulders twitching in time – we're all starting to share the same rhythm, all slowly becoming part of the same machine. It's frustrating, sure, but also mesmerising.

As I watch, I remember the choreographer Sasha Milavic Davies talking about difference and unity in dance on a [podcast with Chris Goode](#) – Davies is interested in synchrony as opposed to unison, where she defines synchrony as people lifting their right hand in the air at the same time, but not necessarily in the same way – if there are ten things happening at the same time, she puts it, only one of those things has to be the same for people to be in synchrony. In *Autóctonos II*, the dancers move in absolute unison. At any point 9/10 things are the same – the angle of their feet, the distance their shoulders move on a turn, the space between their fingers.

They're robots of a kind, and when they eventually break out into a more complex choreography, they slash and punch like characters in a retro video game. The sweat begins to show. They're a little less precise in their unison, and we become more aware of their idiosyncrasies as bodies and performers. *Autóctono* means 'native' or 'indigenous' in Spanish, and there's something here about belonging to a group, though for me what suggests itself more than national or tribal identities is a belonging to industrial systems, of bodies given up to work and endurance. The piece's success lies in its ability to produce the affect, the sweat, of working hard and to a standard of uniformity – to make the audience feel the work.

Autóctonos II is on at ZOO Southside until 27th August 2018. Click [here](#) for more details.