

thINKingDANCE

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In darkness, we disappear together

by Zornitsa Stoyanova

Fringearts is in full force in Philadelphia, and I am in Budapest, watching [L1danceFest](#).

The Last Step Before, by choreographer [Jaro Vi?arský & SKOK!](#) and lighting designer [Pavel Kotlik](#), is the third piece of the night, running almost an hour later than the advertised time. The Mu Theater is hot; people use random pieces of paper to fan themselves. It is also dark, the kind of dark that is illegal in the U.S. No way to know up from down, no safety lights on stairs, no glimmer from a projector. We become nothing in the darkness, losing the horizon and ourselves.

I wonder if my eyes are tricking me or if there is actually perceptible movement on stage. A face, barely lit by a dim light the color of rust, evokes abstract amoebas floating through space, mysteriously changing the distances between us. This dance of perception plays with my equilibrium; I feel myself floating along with the ever-changing shapes.

Though less famous, Kotlik—who created the lighting for this work—is a genius worthy of comparison to the likes of James Turrell.* As the piece continues, his design illuminates a full body, barely recognizable as such. Only then I understand that Jaro is performing a solo, that he is liquid smoke inside the dim light. I know he must be moving through space, but what I see defies my understanding. His silhouette hovers, changing shape, appearing and disappearing closer and further from me. He moves into and out of the light with no sharp angles, no perceptible beginnings or ends, nothing to help identify a body part. It is like watching an inexplicable natural phenomenon—one that has the power to start a religion. We are inside a rollercoaster of darkness; every time Jaro disappears, we ourselves dip back to nothingness.

There is sound—fleeting—I barely remember it, somehow pulling me out of my perception of time and self. The body is the focus, unframed by references to reality. Jaro performs full, embodied dances, propelling himself through space, his upper body guiding his direction. There is only that body and me, a dance between my inner organs and the smoky illusions on stage. I rise, winding upward, dissipating in the ether.

Then it all ends. The house lights come up; I feel my sit bones on the chair, dropped into a jarring reality.

* Artist [James Turrell](#) works with perception by means of light and space. He has exhibited at New York's Guggenheim Museum and his work can be seen at the Skyspace at Chestnut Hill Friends Meeting House in Philadelphia.

The Last Step Before, Jaro Vi?arský & SKOK!, L1danceFest at Mu Theater, Budapest, Hungary, September 18.

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