SPACE & COMPOSITION
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Preface

Miriam Frandsen & Jesper Schou-Knudsen
This publication is the result of the *Space & Composition* symposium organised and held in Copenhagen in 2005 by NordScen and the continuing education department of The Danish National School of Theatre. The publication will provide both documentation and further inspiration for the symposium participants, and anyone else interested in artistic development and research.

*Space & Composition* was a pilot project with one goal: to gather leading international artists and theorists together to concretise and discuss key concepts in the field of new innovative performing arts.

In the Nordic countries, many performing artists are working within the field of ‘physical-visual theatre’, yet there are no explicit theories being created or methods being defined in the area. The field is so large and multifaceted that devising one single theory would make little sense.

However, from across the spectrum, many interesting attempts to understand the phenomenon are being made throughout the world of international theatre and dance. The aim of the symposium was to gather and present a wide selection of this expertise in the Nordic countries. An important premise for the symposium functioning as a forum for no-limit inspiration was therefore the participation of international dance and theatre key-note speakers. *Space & Composition* was therefore based on the criticism of conventional dramaturgy that has emerged, especially in the wake of the new alliances between dance, music and visual and performing arts.
Space & Composition was a 5-day combination of workshops, lectures, and performances. The symposium aimed to present the participants with a kaleidoscopic ‘buffet’ of creative, artistic, and academic inspiration. Considerable interest was shown and a total of about 100 participants from all the Nordic and Baltic countries signed up.

**Contributions**

The publication contains contributions from and about all the lecturers. The contributors do not represent a homogenous group but are all independent artists and theorists whose views on the symposium’s overall theme are based on their own specific point of reference. The result is a wide variety of artistic and research-related perspectives: the construction, utilisation, and understanding of space and composition, as well as tempo and rhythm, structure, montage, and collage of the performance.

The publication is introduced by the symposium moderator, theatre editor Monna Dithmer. In her article, ‘Spacing out’, she examines the phenomenon of ‘space’ in relation to the conflict between individual space and the complex spatial and changeable reality that surrounds us. Rather provocingly, Dithmer identifies new opportunities that can help define and construct space – exemplified to the extreme in the guise of a terrorist using a suicide bomb to create new space by destroying the old.

Next is an interview with director and composer Heiner Goebbels, conducted by Frank Jensen from Danmarks Radio’s *Bolero*, and a portrait by Trine Boje Mortensen from Danmarks Radio’s P2. Heiner Goebbels talks about putting spectators’ experiences in focus and releasing them from their perception of the performance. He does not offer a finished work in which everything is united, but a work that leaves the spectator to create meaning from the various parts. Goebbels’ working methods rebel against both the classical hierarchical allocation of work within the institution of theatre, and the narrative. Goebbels encourages music theatre to gain its inspiration from the visual art – not from psychology and characters.

Professor Gerald Siegmund bases his article, ‘The desiring body in dance’, on the European tradition, which sees the dancers’ physical bodies as an expression of the ‘divine’ movement of the soul. Siegmund explores how we, the spectator, perceive dance and he reviews the development of dance in recent decades using three main criteria: language, image, and body. With examples from e.g. William Forsythe’s, Jérôme Bel’s and Meg Stuart’s works, Gerald Siegmund reveals how the meeting with the spectator is established in terms of
space and composition.

In his performance lecture, ‘Space-relation-movement’ choreographer Thomas Lehmen provides his working method and raises relevant artistic issues in relation to the communication between spectators and performers. Lehmen’s starting point is that space depends on the context created by the dancer and that it is therefore constantly changing.

Janus Kodal’s review of Thomas Lehmen’s piece ‘distanzlos’ performed at Dansescenen in Copenhagen shows Lehmen’s work from a critic’s perspective.

In the article ‘Elements of performance composition: time, space and embodiment’, curator and author Adrian Heathfield studies the categories mentioned in the title using concrete examples from performance theatre during the past 30 years: Franko B’s performance I Miss You!, Forced Entertainment’s Filthy Words and Phrases, Tehching Hsieh’s Time Piece, Bobby Barker’s Kitchen Show, Stelarc’s Copenhagen Suspension, Mariana Abramovic’s Breathing In Breathing Out, and Goat Island’s choreographic works.

The article ‘Space and composition. Conceptual thinking and theatre making’, by associate professor Torunn Kjølner and scenographer Rolf Alme discusses the problematic understanding of genre within the theatre that tends to polarise into traditional-classical theatre versus experimental-performance theatre. Instead, they would like to see the theatre as concept art – as a composition in time and space. Kjølner and Alme create four categories: functional space, representative space, metaphorical or symbolic space and formal or geometric space as necessary approaches to artistic works.

Set designer and producer Jacob Schokking writes about light and shadow as essential spatial resources in his preface to the opera Neither (a libretto by Beckett, music by Morton Feldman). The libretto consists of 85 words, and the music lasts almost an hour. There are no dramatic events in a classical sense but only states and forms in a visual and audible space. States and forms that can be created only on the basis of their mutual interaction.

Artistic director Kristian Seltun writes about the importance of the text in visually oriented performing art in ‘Theatre, text – context: dramaturgy in a spatial art form’. He believes that visual dramaturgy opens up opportunities for kinds of texts that differ a great deal from those traditionally written for the theatre, which he demonstrates with the help of playwright Finn Iunker. Any text is potentially a theatre text. Seltun’s article is also a polemic attack on post-structuralist theory on stage and the exaggerated use of form.
Canadian dramatist and dramaturge Bruce Barton’s article ‘Making change: the composing body in devised theatre’ describes his work with composition and dramaturgy in physical-based theatre. Barton’s core points are the body’s intuition and instinct, and he claims that it is through these that the unexpected and innovative occurs. ‘Body memory’ is vital and the body is not seen as being present in the room but ‘made of space’.

In her article ‘Dance dramaturgy: possible work relations and tools’, dramaturge and Ph.D. student Pil Hansen refers to her work as a dramaturge for Sarah Gebran. Hansen believes there is not just one dance dramaturgy and that we must therefore explore the various dramaturgical tools and work relations in the field of dance.

The goal of the final article, ‘The subject demystified’, written by architect and performance artist Thomas Wiesner, is to present the Space & Composition workshops in the publication together with the participants’ individual perceptions of the overall symposium.

We hope this publication will generate further inspiration, reflection and artistic discussion.

_Miriam Frandsen & Jesper Schou-Knudsen_

_copenhagen, december 2005_
‘You don’t just move into or inhabit a space, you create it’

Monna Dithmer
Spacing Out
Monna Dithmer
‘The world has become a smaller place’. In the era of globalisation, expanding mass media, and massive technological innovation, this may seem a trivial observation. However, coming from a man, who for almost 10 years experienced this as a daily, deadly menace, the effect of living in a globalised society becomes evident. No matter whether he was in The United States, Europe or South Asia, the world famous writer Salman Rushdie was threatened by the fatwa issued by the Iranian Government.

Never at peace... never a dull moment, you may add with a heavy touch of sarcasm. Living under the current spatial and cultural conditions at the same time offers a world of new challenges and opportunities. Indeed, artists and mass media are fast learning how to invade, infiltrate, and remediate the new globalised terms of existence.

Needless to say that Rushdie is an extreme case (with death even inscribed into his name). However, on a general level, 9/11 and the increase of terror, arising from a political clash of cultures, has reinforced the feeling that the world has indeed become a smaller place. We are inextricably connected and exposed to a global, crossover culture, where radically different realities, stories, scenarios and multitudes of people intermingle and exchange places.

The exemplary thing about the Rushdie case is that he in person became a live demonstration of a new dynamic concept of space. A concept which has a further essential characteristic: not only is it a transient place of crossover, it is also an individually generated space. Wherever Rushdie moved as a live target, the place was transformed into a potential site of crime.

Just like the parallel emergence of terrorist suicide bombers shows, any space can be
created – destroyed and transformed – depending on the persons present. The live human bombs serve as detonators of new space. No matter whether they are aimed at destruction, leaving nothing behind them but a hole in the existing spatial structure, they are nonetheless another extreme example of a condition we are all familiar with: you don’t just move into or inhabit a space, you create it.

Within urban politics, a shift towards a more dynamic, interactive notion of space can thus be noticed, leaving behind the old notion of the city as a conglomeration of buildings and institutions, representing overall power structures that exist independently of the daily praxis of its inhabitants. This topological notion is being replaced by an understanding of the city as a space that is being produced by its citizens over and over again. The construction of space is increasingly delegated to the users, the persons on the spot.

POWER FIELDS

One of the artists paving the way for such a dynamic, subjectively oriented concept of space was the American performance artist Vito Acconci. In his performance works during the 1970s he explored the idea of each person’s space as a ‘power field’, the idea being that every individual radiates a personal power field in relation to other people and objects in a particular physical space.

Whereas Acconci’s power fields can be said to be taken to an extreme by the political actions of suicide bombers, the very art of performance can basically be defined as an aesthetic exploration of how to establish a high-tension power field in a specific place. An installation of a person/persons in a particular place, thus highlighting the environment – the logics, aesthetics and atmosphere of what is already there – and at the same time creating a new space. As a site specific, chameleon art praxis performance foregrounded the performative mise en scene skills that are vital in order to manoeuvre through space today.

However, upgrading the notion of power fields with regard to modern hyper complex society, any field must be qualified as a hybrid, multidimensional space, being increasingly electronically amplified as well as culturally diversified. The amount of interferential radiation is massive in a cross-over, interface culture. Just as the computer functions as an interface to a cyber space of unlimited scale, any individual moving about in space, can be seen as acting in an interface of potentially unlimited spatial reach.

As people are increasingly logged on, miked up and plugged in – watching TV, talking on
the mobile, checking emails, while having a row with the person sitting next to you – they are interconnected to a variety of spaces at the same time. The new challenge of being present in a multidimensional space is rapidly becoming an everyday experience. A lived reality of spacing out.

NEW SPATIAL GUIDELINES

To come back to the idea of the world having become a smaller place characterised by a higher degree of mobility and transparency, it should then be emphasised that we are at the same time dealing with a much more complex spatial reality. We are confronted with an enormous, boundless space, containing an overwhelming heap of information, places, histories, images and people that we have to tackle on a daily basis.

How can we deal with the reality of living in a global village if our brains are equipped to embrace no more than 256 people, which is the average number that can be contained in an ordinary plane? This is how Scottish dramatist David Greig posits it in his play San Diego where a plane becomes a poignant metaphor for our transit lives – as kids growing up today will for example spend more time on a plane than together with their grand parents.

What happens to our village-dimensioned brains when confronted with a global society of several billions? How can we deal with the hybrid space of the media landscape and interface culture of today – not to mention tomorrow? These are the challenges, problems as well as opportunities, facing artists, scholars and other creative brains and bodies in the search for new artistic tools and strategies in order to manoeuvre through space.

As space has become a more fluent and transient phenomenon without borders, the question of ‘framing’ has become vital. How to demarcate an aesthetic territory and create an artistic focus within a landscape of unstable limits, where such a thing as the borderline between public and private space has nevertheless become one of the hot zones in modern culture? In the current reality of blended, blurred topologies, the theatre as a specific topos is for instance of renewed interest with its ritualistic division of space, invisible walls, and age old traditions of spatial devising.

The aim of this seminar publication Space & Composition is to present you with a diapason of artistic as well as theoretical guidelines through a late modern landscape of global, hybrid dimensions, and cross-over aesthetics. Please dig in and space out.
A few hours ago we met the German composer and director Heiner Goebbels at a hotel in central Copenhagen. Heiner Goebbels is one of the really big names in music and theatre at present. And he is here for just a few days to talk about his work with his fusion of music, theatre, images and sound. Today Goebbels is 53, and works at a theatre institute at the University of Giessen outside Frankfurt. In recent years Goebbels has worked consciously with the visual idiom in concert performances of modern music. But, we asked him, surely music is first and foremost an abstract, non-visual art form? And Goebbels was willing to concede that. But it does make a difference whether you hear the piece at home on a CD or on the radio, or whether it’s a concert performance?

HG: ‘I think you’re right, because when you listen to it alone at home on a CD or on the radio, then it’s an art form that develops its own optical possibilities. I mean, you have a lot of visual imagination when you hear music. I love the freedom when listening to the radio. The freedom to look where I want and to be able to imagine what I want. But, when I go to a concert, I have to work with what is offered to me on stage. And that’s why I try to compose this too.’

When you say that, do you see yourself as part of a long line of composers like Bach and Beethoven?

HG: ‘I have a strong connection to Bach for example, and that was part of my education, and if I had a minute every day, I would first of all play a piece of Bach’
And as a German composer, working with the visual aspect of your music, do you feel a link with Wagner’s idea of the Gesamtkunstwerk?

HG: ‘No. Not at all. I’m not interested in Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk idea. Probably, what I am working on is rather the opposite. I would consider the spectator to be the major subject of the performance. And if a performance can be total, it can only be total within every one of us looking at it and hearing it. So what I do, unlike Wagner and the tradition of the Gesamtkunstwerk, is to offer the ingredients of the piece. I offer the light, I offer the space, the text, the noise, the music, the action, and the image. But I don’t offer them as something complete – something already completed, already finished. I offer it as ingredients for our perception, and then we can make it into a Gesamtkunstwerk with our listening habits and imagination.’

No indeed. Even though Goebbels works with the visual as part of a concert performance, for example, there is no way this can be compared to something like Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk idea. On the contrary, whereas Wagner wants to tell the whole story in finished form, Goebbels only wants to give the listener the tools to form his or her own images and stories.

It hasn’t been hip to work in a deliberately political way in recent years. But Heiner Goebbels makes no bones about his political interests. And then again, it’s all about giving the audience a space to form their own political visions.

HG: ‘Again I can’t exclude politics, because it’s in everything that we are facing. Of course society and the perception of society is in the music, and in any art form. And I think it’s harder to exclude it than to face it, to make use of it. On the other hand, I would never try to send messages. I never consider politics in any artform to be something that can be said or turned into a message, and then somebody understands it. I try to transfer and to transform politics – also in the structure of my productions and the way I treat the people I work with, and the way I have a space for the audience in my works. I’m very interested in a more democratic, decentralized perspective on the performing arts. And that’s the way I try to express my politics and interests. My political interest may leave me with an empty stage. Because I love it so much that the audience has a space for its imagination.’

What is the most important aspect for composers and directors today, if music theatre is to move forward? Well, Heiner Goebbels says that both composers and directors must learn a whole new visual stage language – a language that lies closer to the visual and that moves
away from the old-fashioned theatre where the psychological portraits of the main characters are the main focus. In short, Goebbels wants to introduce a brand new visual theatrical idiom, and as yet no such thing exists.

HG: ‘I’m not sure that it is already happening. But I think that the musical theatre should draw a lot of inspiration from the visual arts and contemporary dance. What I can see in music theatre in Germany is that we are facing two problems: on the one hand we have composers who change sounds but don’t change the structure of opera. They still work in a very narrative way, and they still respect the speeches of the characters as in any dramatic text. They don’t make use of the enormous chances which this genre offers. The composers didn’t grow up and didn’t develop with performing arts. The other problem is that the directors are still tied to a very old 19th-century storytelling style. We have a few composers who have offered us great non-narrative music in theatrical works – like Nono, Lachenmann, Zimmermann and Cage. But we don’t have the directors yet who are able to stage a non-narrative piece. And that is the next step that we need to go for.’

So it’s the directors who have to teach themselves a new language?

HG: ‘Exactly. They have to learn a language that comes from the visual arts rather than from psychology and character.’
Like a skyrocketing superstar – portrait of Heiner Goebbels

Trine Boje Mortensen DR P2
I can clearly remember how the CD looked. It was green and typical of ECM, cool and tasty. The music was overwhelming and Ensemble Modern was fantastic.

Unfortunately I only heard it a couple of times before it vanished. Yet the composer had made an impression, and when I saw his name on a – then – brand new CD I immediately snatched it up.

The composer’s name was Heiner Goebbels. The CD was called *Shadow/Landscape with Argonauts* – a strange title – and the music completely took my breath away.

I have always had a weakness for words and text as music, and you’d better believe I had something to go weak at the knees for when I heard this CD. It was one of those that didn’t leave the CD player for a long time, and I made sure I got it played for Danish Radio P2’s listeners as much as I possibly could on the now long-defunct programme ‘Indigo’.

**MAKES HIM INTERESTING**

Goebbels was born in 1952. he has studied sociology and music, he has founded and played in bands like Sogenanntes Linksradikales Blasorchester (‘The So-called Left-Radical Brass Band’ – top marks for inventiveness in naming), the Goebbels/Harth Duo (not quite so inventive) and the art-rock trio Cassiber.

He has composed music for radio, theatre, film, ballet, and the concert hall. He has created music-theatre pieces, radio-works and even an opera, and he mixes genres so it’s quite impossible to find out what to call what he does – and that makes it all the more interesting.
My interest in the music of Heiner Goebbels has only grown since then – a composer who mentions Hanns Eisler and The Beach Boys as two of his sources of inspiration will always be close to my heart.

**MUSIC LIKE NO ONE ELSE**

Heiner Goebbels is no longer as sort-of-undergroundish as he was then, many years ago when I came across him.... hmm, perhaps I’d better take that back... Even when I first came across his music he had already risen quite a bit from the underground.

Today he is a superstar skyrocketing through the firmament of contemporary music. A star with its own quite unique path, for his music sounds like no one else's – it’s jam-packed with energy and reflection, as well as pessimism and strange humour. And it isn’t the slightest bit afraid of making contact with the listener.

Goebbels’s music is about real things, about great thoughts and big feelings – and you can hear it. It’s sensual music for the head – or a kick in the head for the senses.

**A TOWN TRANSLATED INTO MUSIC**

Heiner Goebbels’s work *Surrogate Cities* is a town set to music.

The contrastful spaces, voices and moods of the city are whipped up in a pulsating, kaleidoscopic mix of genres and styles in a work that involves a large symphony orchestra, singers and a sampler. It is contemporary music, soul, rock, jazz – uniting in one cacophonous, electrifying burst of expression.

‘I try to read the city like a text’, says Goebbels – ‘to translate its mechanics and architecture into music’. The result is a multi-faceted, multi-layered work. The truth about the city (if such a truth exists) is hidden in the joints between the bricks, the clashes between the elements, the friction between words and music.

**VOICES FROM ANOTHER WORLD**

Goebbels has chosen two world stars to recite, sing, read and scream a selection of the texts from *Surrogate Cities*: the jazz and soul diva Jocelyn B. Smith and the vocal artist David Moss. *Lyt til Nyt* has talked to them about words, sound and meanings in *Surrogate Cities*. 
THE VISUAL COMPOSER

‘ – I would consider the spectator to be the major subject of the performance. I offer the tools, but it’s up to the spectator to create his or her own story’.

So says the German composer and director Heiner Goebbels. In his productions he fuses music, theatre, words and images.
The desiring body in dance

Gerald Siegmund
Let me begin with a question. It is an old and even trivial one: Why do we watch dance at all? Why do we sit in a dark room night after night watching dancers engaged in some kind of choreography, moving across the stage creating the special rhythm and the atmosphere of a dance performance? The answer is simple: Because we enjoy it. We go to the theatre to bring our love to the stage and those ghostlike creatures that inhabit it. Raised on a platform they are elevated, they are separated and removed from us, acting in a sphere distinct from ours. And yet the two realms are bound together by this institution we call theatre, where those up there expose themselves and give us something to see while we watch from down there. But what do we desire to see and experience there? How is this enjoyment channeled and structured? One answer, albeit a rather general one and one that gives rise to even more questions, is, of course, the Other. We want to enjoy the Other. Which Other? Some life-affirming force that is often associated with dance? The energetic presence of the dancers who share time and space with us for the duration of the performance? Their rather special, sometimes even erotic bodies that are able to perform all kinds of tricks we would not even dream of trying?

I would like to throw some light on what I call the desiring body in dance. The concept of the desiring body enables me to develop a line of theoretical thought on what is at stake when they dance and we watch. First, let me approach the question of enjoyment and the Other on a more basic level. The founding principle of our Western theatrical experience is the split. We as members of the audience hand over knowledge, expertise and even our bodies to some specialists called ‘dancers’. They perform for us and in front of us. They thereby articulate and to some extent mirror experiences from the superior vantage point of what we cannot do, while simultaneously channeling our desires in the legitimate form
provided by the theatre. They dance for us in another space and time; they are our alibis in
the literal sense of the word ‘alibi’ meaning ‘in another space’. In his essay on dance La pas-
sion d’être un autre, Pierre Legendre traces this fundamental split back to the Judeo-Christian
roots of our culture. ¹ The split is the result of the Christian prohibition on dancing. Dance
from the 5th century onwards was excluded from the liturgy and replaced by the singing and
speaking voice. Christian moral law, which regulates the subject’s relationship towards its
body and therefore also to dance, has condemned the body as sinful and in need of being
saved by the soul. The prohibition of dance functions as a kind of castration, which cuts the
desiring body of from itself and, of necessity, inscribes it into the laws of culture. Dancing
as stage dancing therefore represents the desire of the human being, which is made to
speak on stage. Because it is forbidden for the body to dance officially, professional dancers
have to find a way to make the soul dance. The symbolic law takes possession of the body
by cutting it to pieces and reassembling its parts according to the principles of reason,
which is granted to human beings because they are different from animals as the only ones
who can walk upright. The human being’s erectness enables him or her to see the heavens
and the face of God. Dance technique as dance language ensures that it is the soul that
dances and not the body, because it fabricates a second body that speaks truthfully.

After a detour via the European courts of the Renaissance, which were organised socially
as stages representing a secularized model of political-religious worship of the king or
the duke, the prohibition of dance eventually gave rise to the institution of theatre as a
split space. In the theatre, we legitimately and safely participate in the desiring body of the
dancer by watching him or her dance, which is equivalent to dancing ourselves, because
we see the soul in the dancer’s eyes mirroring our own gaze. The graceful and dignified
dancers, think of Heinrich von Kleist’s puppet on a string or Edward Gordon Craig’s notion
of the Übermarionette, speak truthfully because it is only the soul that dances, and not the
body that is overcome by principles of elevation and lightness aspiring towards heaven.
Viewed from this anthropological perspective, there is no difference at all between ballet
and modern dance, between Isadora Duncan and Mikhail Fokine, between Martha Graham
and George Balanchine. They are all, as Graham put it herself in her autobiography, ‘an
athlete of God’. ²

Legendre’s thinking gives rise to a somewhat more structural model of dancing bodies,
which includes those bodies that simply watch others dancing: they are all desiring bodies.
In his book Le corps et sa danse, the French psychoanalyst Daniel Sibony draws a triangle
explicating the fundamental relation between the constituent elements of stage dancing.
There was the viewing body or spectator – the mass, you – and the dancing body (singular or plural, including the choreographer who forms one body with the dancers and extends the limits of his body with their dance), and there was the pole of the Other, which is evoked by the holy dances, but which is there all the time; it is the heated and glowing hearth from which creation springs, the spring of alterity…. and this triangle is set in motion, it vibrates: the dancing body invokes the audience in search of the other pole, the Other which does not have a palpable body but which is a presence: the presence of the original being that is, as the trigger of language and of memory, the support of that which exceeds everything that is, and, most of all, exceeds the body.3

The dancer simultaneously undergoes a relationship with his own body as Other, with the crowd that watches, and with the Other as a set of symbolic codes and rules inscribed in the theatre situation. This interpellation asks him or her to fulal a function, to assume a role as dancer during the time spent on stage. The dancing body meets the viewing body during the spectacle, both of which present themselves in front of a third body that Sibony calls the Other. Derived from the religious function of dancing, this Other is surely not God any more in our secularised societies of today. Its function, however, remains with us. The idea of the Other remains the source of creation, because it is capable of producing language and memory, because it describes the cultural horizon in front of which there is dance, in front of which we watch, understand, and interpret dance. Dance in this sense gives rise to cultural and individual memories. It carves out a space for our desire, a space in which the dancing and the viewing subjects meet and miss each other. I miss the performers while I watch them and I miss the performers after they have left the stage.

What do we make of this on a more concrete level? Dance takes place on three levels simultaneously. It belongs to the level of language, of the image and of the body. This body, therefore, can never be a unified entity. The dancing body as a desiring body is always already threefold. According to the structural model of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, on whose ideas I shall repeatedly draw here, it belongs to the three registers of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. It articulates a certain relation to the symbolic order presenting a utopian sense of community or societas. At the same time, it produces images of the body that lure us into believing that other bodies than the ones we produce for everyday life are possible. It makes us believe in potential bodies. Lastly, it reminds us that bodies are made of flesh and blood. They consist of energies that may eventually lead to the collapse of meaning and symbolic codes during the performance. The materiality of the body cuts through the symbolic to produce a kind of auratic presence of the remains of the body.4
Based on this model, a line of analysis arises that tries to produce questions with regard to a dance performance, questions rather than categories that have to be identified by the scholar.

1. On the level of the symbolic questions with regard to theatrical representation have to be asked. What are the stage conventions within which the performers work? What is the visual apparatus of the theatre, what are its perspectives? How are gazes organised? If dance technique functions as a language of dance, how does it regulate the access to the stage? Who is allowed to dance and to stand in for us as our alibis? In the 17th century, the French king Louis XIV had a simple answer to that question: by means of a unified pedagogy under the auspices of the Académie royale de danse founded by him in 1661, the Law creates subjected bodies, which in turn represent and make evident the order of the absolutist state that has produced them in the first place. More pertinent for our debates today would be the question of non-professional dancers. Why is critical opinion so skeptical about them? Is it because we fear that it might only be their social bodies that move rather than their souls that dance?

Let me give you two examples for the questions raised on the level of the symbolic, examples that deal with the apparatus of the theatre to de- and recompose its space in certain ways.

RE 1: WILLIAM FORSYTHE, ENDLESS HOUSE

In an interview William Forsythe called his two-part piece Endless House, which premiered in Frankfurt in October 1999, a critical engagement with the ‘politics of viewing’ 5. The practices of viewing, which always encompass politics and economics, are for him inscribed into the history of ballet, a history that a contemporary choreographer must inevitably tackle. The ghosts of ballet’s tradition, with which Forsythe has been dealing since his piece Artifact (1984), catch up with him the moment he enters an opera house. Already in its architecture, the division into stage and auditorium, and the sight lines on stage some historical formations live on that have their origins in the theatre’s and ballet’s courtly aristocratic past. The first part of Forsythe’s Endless House takes place in the Frankfurt Opera House – whose auditorium remains partly empty. The spectators are on the balconies, from where they have a distant though complete overview of the stage above which, after a short duo by two men who move slowly towards the front from a vanishing point centre stage, lampions and prospectuses are meditatively lowered and raised for the following forty-five minutes.
In the first part of *Endless House*, Forsythe grants every spectator nearly the same view of the stage. Yet what their eyes perceive is the stage machinery of theatre as a technical apparatus. The illusion machine of theatre runs empty. What it reflects and returns to the spectator is his or her own gaze that no longer takes supreme possession of the action (which remains absent), but only of itself.

What is exposed here are the implications of linear perspective. What are the associations of ‘perspective’? When it emerged in Italian painting in the fifteenth century, it meant a technique with which three-dimensional objects could be represented on a two-dimensional surface in such a way that the relation of the depicted things created the same impression of their size and distance as their ‘real’ counterparts in nature. The condition of this similarity is that both nature and its depiction are viewed from one definite point at which the rays of light reflected by the objects meet in the eye of the beholder.\(^6\)

What is important for my argument is the fact that the tip of this visual pyramid is located in the eye, an eye that remains outside its own field of vision. The seeing eye thus remains invisible to itself. Yet what does this eye see? In the place where the lines meet is the vanishing point that now forms the exact counterpoint of the seeing eye in the geometrical arrangement of the field of vision. The eye sees through the field, or, in the case of art, through the canvas into the vanishing point from which it looks itself in the eye.

The composition of space is therefore linked to the creation of a subject. The space of the theatre gives the subject a place from which to speak and from which to gain possession of itself. In the case of the perspectival constructions of theatrical spaces that began in the Renaissance and continues way into the 20th century, this subject is the universal and holistic subject of reason that sees itself seeing, thereby controlling and taking possession of the things that lie on its way to self-consciousness. Jonathan Crary has claimed in his study *Techniques of the Observer* that until the seventeenth and eighteenth century, viewing was conceived as a sensual experience, yet one that was restricted to the eye of a viewer who remained outside the things he saw.\(^7\) Seeing is a disembodied experience in the service of thought, of reason. Ballet had subscribed to this concept of hierarchical viewing since its beginnings by representing in allegorical form this power of a ruler on certain occasions, for example weddings. This arrangement later gave rise to a theatrical space whose stage was framed by a proscenium arch.

Perspective is a ‘re-created reality’, as Nelson Goodman puts it.\(^8\) An intervention into the symbolic system of perspective thus implies an intervention into the symbolic order of our
society, its subjects, and their relation to the images that they perceive and in which they are always already perceived as subjects. Different compositions of space change the concept of the subject related to space. Spilt subjects emerge, subjects of desire with eyes that not only see themselves but with bodies that hear, smell and touch, which lose themselves in the act of watching. The second part of Forsythe's *Endless House* completely disintegrates the strict hierarchical order of perception of the first part. After a change of location that takes the audience on a subway train to an old streetcar depot, the spectator finds him – or herself in an open space. Across the entire more than thirty metre long room of the depot that has been divided into three large centres or groupings, simultaneous dance activity happens between which the spectator must find a position. Mobile flats constantly rearrange the space and thus the lines of sight onto the action. There is a choreography of space that begins by dividing the performance space into three distinct units. In the course of the performance, however, the space at the back of the hall gets smaller by the use of the flats whereas the middle and ultimately the front are enlarged like a funnel opening up. In this moving and ever-changing space it is impossible to see everything. It is equally impossible to follow one sequence from one fixed position. One’s view is constantly blocked, one is repeatedly tempted to change position yet without being forced to follow this urge. Everyone can choose their perspective freely, a perspective that, however, openly displays its limitations. If everyone saw everything, yet eventually only his or her own act of viewing, in *Endless House I*, now no one sees everything, not even the choreographer who finds himself somewhere in the space giving directions.

Like in a ritual, in *Endless House II* there are only participants. There are no outside eyes since everyone is engaged in the performance space. Everybody is part of the picture, not standing outside and controlling it. Both parts of *Endless House* may be considered to be a reflection on perspective including its strategies of empowerment, but also its dissolution. It is a reflection on the limits of aesthetic experience, on whose one end the dissolution of art in ritual is located. For aesthetic experience begins to disintegrate in the first part through the paralysis of the gaze. We see everything, but we really see nothing at all. In the second part it disappears behind a constantly shifting arrangement that makes the boundaries between fictional and real space permeable. This gives the spectator a much larger responsibility. Everyone composes his or her own piece by constructing an individual relation to the dancers for whom the spectators must take over some responsibility in the divided space. In this way, *Endless House* also becomes a social experiment that explores a form of togetherness that no longer thrives on the binary opposition of stage and auditorium, but it composes a space which gains its strength from a field of individual differences.
**MY SECOND EXAMPLE DEALS WITH THE FUNCTION OF NON-PROFESSIONAL DANCERS: JÉRÔME BEL, *THE SHOW MUST GO ON***

A discjockey enters with a stack of CDs and takes his seat in front of the stage right in the middle behind a CD player. He inserts CD after CD, 19 well-known popsongs everybody can sing along with. Between 18 and 21 dancers, actors and actresses enter only to perform exactly that which the lyrics of the songs say. When the Beatles’ ‘Come Together’ is played, they all come on stage – only to start dancing when then David Bowie’s ‘Let’s dance’ blasts out of the speakers. Or they perform scenes inscribed in our cultural memory, such as the little dance routine to ‘Maccarena’ or Leonardo di Caprio holding Kate Winslet with wide-open arms on the Titanic to the sound of Celine Dion’s ‘My Heart Will Go On’.

Bel’s bodies are always already acknowledged bodies, acknowledged by the symbolic order of language represented by popmusic and its personal and collective memories. Everybody can do what these people do on stage. No dance technique is required, no training to perform virtuosic tricks. In their everyday clothes, the performers seem to be part of the audience, metonymically displaced on stage. The composition of space here is contiguous. Stage and auditorium are not hierarchically structured but meant to flow into one another with the DJ and his music as the link between the two. By not dominating the audience with a virtuoso performance of a fictional world Bel opens up an area of negotiation with the public. When John Lennon’s ‘Imagine’ is played, the theatre gets completely dark. With Simon & Garfunkel’s ‘The Sound of Silence’ only the title line can be heard, the rest is silence. Bel literally hands the performance over to the audience’s imagination. It is our show, because we are already culturally inscribed in it. The avoidance of theatrical bodies also does away with the traditional situation of the audience as voyeur in a darkened auditorium. A mutual give and take sets in, an exchange of bodies that are equal in their being different, a difference which is maintained by the proscenium arch that separates performers and audience.

William Forsythe’s *Endless House* and Jérôme Bel’s *The Show Must Go On* were two examples of dance and theatre dealing with the symbolic laws of our culture inscribed in theatrical space and its composition. Let me now turn to my second category, the imaginary.

2. On the level of the imaginary movement, gaze and the body have to be conceptualised differently: not as language, perspective and subjected body, but as image and desired object. While moving, the dancer creates an imaginary body by looking at himself with a little help from cultural images, other media images that may either be used
The desiring body in dance

on stage or may be incorporated in the gaze of the dancer already. Think of Isadora Duncan’s love of images from ancient Greece on which she modelled her free dance or Belgian director Michael Laub’s incorporated filmic gaze that structures the bodies in his performances. As a desired object, the gaze functions as the scopic drive. It projects the body into the void, thereby creating a negative of the body which is simultaneously absent, yet also present out there on stage, where it encircles the desired object which is movement. Or the other way round: it is not movement that is encircled by the gaze, but the gaze of the dancers functions as the desired object, in Lacanian terms the small ‘object a’, that is desired by the moving gaze of the audience. In both cases, dance oscillates between movement that hides the object – because it is always already somewhere else, literally moving along, thereby displacing itself as object – and on the other hand inactivity, standstill that kills both movement and the object it desires.

Let me give you an example for the use of media images on stage that creates a space where past, present and future coincide by the overlapping of imaginary images.

RE 2: VINCENT DUNOYER, THE PRINCESS PROJECT

From what I explained about the threefold body of a dancer, it follows that even when dancing a solo, a dancer doesn’t dance alone. Even when one is alone on stage, there is always another body that one dances with. The friction between the dancer’s present ‘real’s body on stage with that other body is exemplified by the mirror. It projects an image of what the dancer should be in the future and reflects back at him or her a potential body yet to be created. This mechanism is most obvious in ballet classes, where the imperative mirror functions as a normative prescription of an ideal body. But in a more basic sense, it is also at work in any other dance form that does not look for an ideal. The crucial point here is that dance always happens in between. Dance is an in between art form that happens between bodies, their images, and their symbolic and social roles. The use of media in dance as an extension of the original mirror enhances the body’s potential. It proliferates and refracts images of the body that fall back upon the dancing body on stage. These mediated images introduce a second point of view. They see the body from someplace else. The gaze returns to the dancer from beyond the limits of his own body and thus opens up the space where dance can take place. This in-between space is the space of fantasies. French dancer and choreographer Vincent Dunoyer who for a long time was a member of Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker’s group Rosas, designed his piece The Princess Project (2001) around the idea of an absent partner. The piece is a reflection on the structure of love and desire. Thus – as
in classical narrative ballet – the princess becomes an ideal of love, which will here, however, be exposed for what it is: a figment of our imagination. The pas de deux as an expression of love is turned into a double solo in which Dunoyer dances with his own image. Dunoyer stages the phantasm of love, which is always more engaged with projections than with reality.

The piece is divided into four parts with an epilogue. The titles of the scenes are projected onto a screen stage left. ‘Opening scene – A room – Two persons – B and B – They had the same dream at the same time – Music’ can be read there. In the opening scene Dunoyer sits with his back to the audience, moving on his behind across the floor in geometrical patterns. When he gets up he strides up and down, bringing his body out of balance until he falls over. His concentrated movements are tense and vigorous. Act 1 is recorded by a camera and played back during act 2. There the camera also produces a live image of Dunoyer’s current dancing and adds it to the recording, so that Dunoyer is engaged in a pas de deux with his own image.

In fact, there are three Dunoyer’s on stage simultaneously. The recorded image coming back from the immediate past co-exists with a live recording of the body, while at the front of the stage the real Vincent Dunoyer is dancing alone. The coordination of movements and gazes is perfect, thus creating the illusion of a couple engaged in a romantic love affair where even their bodies blend into one another. It is a scene coming from the future: an ideal that does not yet exist, but which is literally projected on stage as a figment of our imagination.

The Princess Project consists of a third gaze intervening between audience and dancer. Part of the visual set-up are two TV monitors facing each other along the middle axis of the stage, the one in front with its back to the audience allowing the dancer to check his own image. Behind the one at the back, a camera records Dunoyer’s movements from a different position than that of the audience. The camera gaze doubles and diverts the gaze of the audience exteriorised in a film projection. Thus the imaginary relationship between audience and dancer is doubled on stage by the relationship between the dancer and his image. The physical absence of the princess unveils the grounding mechanism that every dancing body is subject to, namely his or her own spectralisation in a continual process of projections.

The repetition of the dance sequence on video and the live synchronisation with its actual repetition towards the front of the stage not only superimpose bodies. It also superimposes layers of time. These repetitions are not repetitions of specific things or moments taken out
of their original context. They are repetitions of the past as such which co-exists with every moment of the present. According to Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Henri Bergson’s *Matière et mémoire* they form time images which encapsulate the whole past in a crystal-like architecture.¹⁰

**LET ME NOW COME TO MY THIRD AND LAST CATEGORY, THE REAL.**

3. On the level of the real, movement can be conceived as *jouissance*: as that which is more than sense, that which exhausts meaning in movement. Because it will always be more than meaningful and readable, I can enjoy the moving body. I can become fascinated by it, love it, hate it, be appalled yet drawn into its actions. The body on the level of the real functions as a link with that which is excluded from the symbolic (meaning), but which returns, for instance in Meg Stuart’s physical tics and twitches, or in Boris Charmatz’s bursts of energy from under the skin. The body as a fetish works as a *sinthome* of the real.¹¹ It is both a site of fascination, which results from its materiality, as well as a site of horror, which, as in Jan Fabre’s performances, threatens to break down the symbolic by sheer physical exhaustion.

The example I chose for illustrating what I mean by the term the real is from Meg Stuart’s piece *No Longer Ready Made* from 1993.

**RE 3: MEG STUART, NO LONGER READY MADE**

A piano hammers away beating staccato rhythms into our ears. A man stands on stage trapped in a rectangle of light that keeps him immobile on the spot. He shakes his head, shakes it wildly and violently jerking it from left to right as if he wanted to avoid something invisible to the audience. Impatiently he raises his arms, points three fingers in the air, turns the palms of his hand and snaps his thumb up thus triggering a game with his uncontrollable fingers that seems to exist independently of his head movements. His torso is set in motion, he turns it in half circles while his arms and fingers are playing in front of his face. Suddenly he stops and begins to shake violently. His trembling agitates his body once again, it plays with the contours of his body which begin to undulate into the space. The space vibrates. Neither here nor there, neither in his place nor someplace else, his body remains in limbo. As if fighting for release, movement bursts out of the body in endless minimal twitches. But the body refuses to set it free.

You may, of course, read this and interpret it: a body in a state of shock, a man – Canadian dancer Benoit Lachambre – is torn apart. He loses himself in the movements. He hands
over the control of his body to a force unknown to him and to us. A force that leaves him
despite all his struggles without a will of his own. His gaze tries to stop his hand but ulti-
mately it only runs after it. A body dissociates itself in individual parts as if consciousness
had lost its power to integrate its constituent elements.

You may read all this, but you may and most likely you will be overwhelmed by the sheer
physical exhaustion Lachambre is driven into. Meg Stuart and Benoit Lachambre choreo-
graph micromovements, residual movements for which no code exists, twitches of the body
that escape conscious control or meaning. Choreography no longer structures the move-
ment of bodies in space, but it decomposes the body that is itself a space. The space that
Meg Stuart composes in this scene is the space of the body as a site of contention.

Shedding its skin, the body becomes almost impossible to move. It remains fixed and stable
while all the time stepping out of itself in an *ekstasis* that makes visible an uncodifiable ener-
gy and a revolt of the body, a revolting body, as the core of the dancing subject.

**TO CONCLUDE:** On all three levels the idea of absence plays a crucial role: on the level of the
symbolic absence of the Other as an entity that can be represented (since neither God nor
language may be represented in their entirety: language has no way of verifying itself, as
Roland Barthes once concluded in *La chambre claire*. It has no means of turning around and
looking at itself.12 It can never get a true or full picture of itself and this is where the func-
tion of the imaginary appears, ‘Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image’, as God said
to Moses in the Old Testament, for God, like language or the code, or the Matrix in the film
of the same name, is ubiquitous.); on the level of the imaginary, where the absence of the
object as maternal phallus *produces* a sequence of desired objects; and finally on the level of
the real as the absence of meaning and meaningful movement as well as the trauma of the
collapse of the body and the entire performance.

As desiring bodies we are moved by what we see as spectators. But the site of this moving
and being moved is not the phenomenological presence of the dancers. *L’(é)mouvant, das
Bewegende*, as I would like to call it, takes place in the absence, that is to say in the inter-
stices of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. Moving and being moved is a question
of that which is not present, but given as negative space, as a *volume* of bodies and the
phenomenologically empty spaces in between the dancer’s bodies. This volume includes
my own body as a spectator as a negative imprint. I am carried away, ghostlike and ghosted,
to where I am not. The same holds true for movement: the negative space of movement is
that which is not performed but given as a mere potential, a potential that functions as a
barrier and friction towards the movement that is performed. The absent as the site of watching and understanding dance is what motivates my final observation. It allows for a theoretical view on dance that takes as its basis that which cannot be captured, that which escapes – and by doing so implies the spectator's subjectivity and his or her desire.

NOTES

8. Goodman, op. cit., p. 15
9. Sibony, op. cit. p. 171
‘Space is constantly changed by the vision, movement, time, and the sensation the dancers create’

Thomas Lehmen
Space – Relation – Movement
A system theoretical approach to choreography
Thomas Lehmen
This article is based on Thomas Lehmen’s performance lecture, which included physical movements and demonstrations together with theory.

Lehmen begins the lecture trying to show a special dance in a theatre space and sharing the awareness of its impossibility with a seated audience.

One of the issues yet to be explained is the offside rule in football.

Lehmen explains the offside rule on the chalkboard

Space would seem to be a medium realised through interdependency with other media. Space can exist only in relation to other weird elements such as movement, time, sound and, of course, the perception of all these phenomena – things we are not able to define clearly.

Our bodies have not a single straight bone, joint, cell or any element of Euclidic geometry. Our great dependency on Euclidic space may well be caused by the illusion of the straight lines created by the horizon of land, sea, and sky. It is more likely, however, that the design of the straight line makes for greater efficiency in the technical structure of the world – in short, it is a complete invention. Good for description and simulation.

We even have proof that it is a fabrication: with formal mathematical tools (which are designed to describe straight lines), Einstein’s theory of relativity demonstrates the
existence of the unity space/time in which no straight lines exist; even a light beam gets bent by matter. So space/time was not invented, it has always existed; it just proved possible to formulate this interpretation and to use it to describe the world.

We could think: space depends on the action, perception and the observation I make; it depends on the system through which I plan to see the world.

A dancer is in no doubt about this. The work of Lisa Nelson, for example, in *Vision and Movement*, a piece which uses partnering, open and closed eyes, imagination etc., makes it quite clear to everybody who dances that space depends on the creator of its context: the dancer. It is not only that the observer moves – as in Einstein’s example of the moving person in the moving train relating to points outside, which also move – but two or more dancers move independently, observe each other, and their movements influence each other’s movements and space. Space is constantly changed by the vision, movement, time, and the sensation these dancers communicate.

From a conventional central-perspective approach, as is the case in most dance pieces, it is hard for the seated audience to move into other dimensions of perception. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd dimensions, which traditionally all describe pure space, are followed by the 4th: time. With that, if we want to pursue this logic for a moment, we have the unity space/time. In a theatre context, these 4 dimensions are quickly understood and the brain immediately asks for more dimensions. The choreographer does not want to run the risk of boredom and so adds a 5th dimension, that of sense-meaning, which is usually represented by certain characteristics, images, music, qualities of movements or a few words. The audience contextualises the observed action via memory and the actual process of perception. This takes place within the culturally pre-established agreement about what is likely to happen and how far it will be allowed to go. (These parameters of course include the expectation of the offence of being breached – that something will happen to extend the borders of that unspoken agreement.)

So if, for a moment, we picture ourselves sitting in the audience at a dance performance, we will observe an observation of an action and from that higher perspective we can point out the difference in observation and action. This is what systems theory calls ‘second order observation’. And because one way of creating sense is through difference, with this difference we create the unity of a new system: the system of the unity of difference, of action/observation.
AND NOW WE GET EVEN MORE SYSTEM THEORETICAL:
ONE SYSTEM CANNOT BE UNDERSTOOD FROM OUTSIDE.

It cannot be understood from the perspective of another system, which obviously uses other codes of description than the observed one. If it had the same codes it would not be another system, but the same one. This means that the individual only understands him/herself – or creates another system. And in the theatre the new system that is created is of course the one of temporary agreement about the nature of the communicated sense-meaning – the sense-meaning which is created by the unity of the difference of action/observation.

One interesting approach, which I would like to mention here, is the work of Felix Ruckert. In one of his pieces, the audience is blindfolded, physically manoeuvred by touch through the space and more or less sexually stimulated. Should the person so choose, the action can reach masochistic levels. With its constraint of being completely passive and not being allowed to turn the action around, this idea is probably one of the most simple and radical solutions to our problem. **The physical body of the audience is the theatre, the space in which the dance is happening.** The piece, of course, consists only of the sensations of the audience. And, of course, it is only these basal sensations – of being helpless, and the resulting emotions – that are actually communicated, because no one is allowed to observe the complete situation of manipulators and victims.

But I think: The best job in the theatre is that of the technician between shows. One show has just been dismantled; the next show has yet to be assembled. The technician just has to switch on the work lights and be there, because he is scheduled to do so. Not really anything to do, no one there to get on his nerves.

It smells of dust and the oxygen is filtered out by the air conditioning, the space seems to be polluted by electro-smog; everything is painted black and this space has never seen a ray of genuine sunlight, nor ever will. This is real emptiness. A little bit like being in the cellar as a child, having no fear and enjoying the silence. The unoccupied surrounding space allows the sensation of oneself to extend into that space.

I am space, my sensation is spatial, my images are in space.

As soon as the show has assembled all its ingredients, it takes to the stage and, if people think they understand, it is over.
Space is filled. Thinking-space is filled with images. In order to take part in this communication, I must differentiate between unknown and known, turn undefined into defined, unmarked space into marked space, as they say in systems theory.

As an observer I cannot understand the person who is working there on stage, I can only understand my interpretations of myself in relation to the stage performer. I can, furthermore, be part of the temporary agreement, of the mutual system we create. When both sides share this understanding of the situation, we have what systems theory calls ‘communication of double contingency’. If this communication is transparently themed as part of the concept, it then in turn facilitates an observation of the way in which theatre communicates in general, how the world communicates. And therefore we need unoccupied space, unmarked space. Therefore we need a theatre without expectations. Therefore we need the risky moment of ‘in between the shows’, the dust and silence within the show.

The observation creates sense by differentiating between unoccupied space and occupied space. Marking the border of the horizon and crossing the horizon back and forth. Marking what is still unknown by giving it a space.

If the show does not present the empty dusty space, then the mind will do so anyway. We can even make a good observation with an unfamiliar piece if we take its own thinking seriously enough.

The possibility of differentiation is helped by giving everything its own space.

For example, in my solo piece distanzlos I found the trick of talking about what I am going to do next, and then I take a step aside and do it.

Lehmen explains the set-up of his solo distanzlos in which he is performing the following: ‘What the fuck do you think I am doing here?, then he goes to the front and says: ‘In this idea you hear me asking the public: What the fuck do you think I am doing here?’ Then he steps aside and asks the public: ‘What the fuck do you think I am doing here?’ He steps back and explains: ‘And I repeat the question and I increase the volume and the intensity.’ Stepping aside again he says louder and more intensely: ‘What the fuck do you think I am doing here?’

Stepping back: ‘And I repeat the question several times and each time I increase the volume and the intensity. And I show you the last one.’ Stepping aside he screams at the audience: ‘What the fuck do you think I am doing here?’
Another example:

‘Now I will rehearse the dance that I will dance for my mother on her 80th birthday.’

Lehmen does a beautifully simple dance, while thinking about his mother.

Very often people laugh a lot, although I try to be very serious. I think this is the secret of all great comedians: unable to cope with the surrounding world, but trying hard.

I am not saying that I am the first person ever to do something like this, but it works: the audience differentiates between the announced and the action, and is allowed to think about more possibilities. The being of the performer oscillates between the differently perceived states of the performer in the mind of the audience and the actual being of the performer. This creates the reality which factually exists in the theatre – what is communicated is ‘real’.

beuys’ corner of public space, ausgegossene Ecke

In his hometown of Düsseldorf, the German artist Josef Beuys goes with some students to a dirty, unattractive, forgotten corner formed by part of a house, a bridge and a street. They build a kind of firm, compact fence in front of this corner, leaving about a one-metre space between the fence and the house, bridge and street. They fill this empty space with liquid paraffin. After cooling down and stabilising, this negative form cast from the positive form of the negative dirty corner of public space is put in a gallery. In the gallery everybody is free to think about public space – about how to make unattractive public space positive, for example.

That is how it happened – or slightly differently, I was not there with them.

So my questions are:

Do I create work that fills spaces, or work that creates empty spaces?

If I fill forms, what do they evoke? To which context do they relate and how?

Do I make art that creates questions or answers?

If communication in the theatre is a creative process, if observation and participation are part of the process of creating this reality, then what about working with the ideas of the audience directly?

Can art go further than the representation of images, or is it just a tool?

Are there perhaps more actual processes happening than we can describe?
Which kind of human being do I want to present? Which process do I want the audience to be part of – the one of depending on conditions or of being able to steer, to create?

‘STATIONEN’

Space as social space. Understanding theatre as a social space to be shared.

Lehmen gives a complex explanation of his ‘Stationen’ and the background of the piece.

Issues:
Round table, people from different professions, ‘how does it work, how does it function?’, inside-outside theatre, people are the makers and the observers of the piece, the social systems created by each society such as art, science, education, religion, economics, etc., ..., ..., ...

In the next Lehmen explains his way of working with choreography:

In one of my choreographic systems, called ‘Categories’, I work with the interdependency of space.

‘CATEGORIES’

This is a structure for 4, 5, 7 or more dancers; the total number of the group is not a multiple of the number 3.

The Categories
- Space (architecture, measurements, outside)
- Relation (dancers with one another)
- Movement (physical movement)
circulate in a sequence.

This means that Space always follows Movement. Relation always follows Space. After Relation comes Movement. After Movement comes Space again, etc. Using this principle, the structure can start and finish with any of these categories.

Each dancer finds one element within these categories.
For example, Space: ‘near the audience’, ‘lower than one metre’, ‘where you would make love’.

Relation: ‘in couples’, ‘looking at each other’, ‘follow the most beautiful one’.

Movement: ‘shaking’, ‘walk like your father’, ‘contemporary dance’.
These structural elements will be announced and will be maintained by all dancers after entering and before exiting.

The first dancer comes on stage, announces an individual element of one chosen category (i.e. *Space*) and performs it.

The second dancer enters, joins the action which is already going on, announces an individual element of the next category (here *Relation*) and both dancers execute both elements of these different categories at the same time.

The third dancer enters, joins the action, announces an individual element of the next category (in this case *Movement*) and all three dancers execute 3 different elements of 3 different categories at the same time.

Now the fourth dancer replaces one element. He enters, joins the action, announces his element of the category that was originally chosen by the first dancer (here *Space*) and thereby changes the element of that category. The other elements of the other categories remain, executed as part of a new combination with this new element.

The fifth dancer joins as described and replaces the element of the next category (*Relation*). More dancers join in the same way so that there is a continuous change of elements, connection and sense. One element is always changed while two elements always remain.

While executing this structure, each dancer has to keep track of two sequences: the categories and the order of the dancers. The latter does not have to be fixed in advance.

Before each run or show the elements should be chosen anew, and the dancers should not reveal them to one another. Each element may also refer to another context – it could say something about the dancers, the environment or the idea behind the categories.

Because the agreement is to do what someone says, the elements determine where the show goes spatially. In some runs we ended up on the street, in the toilet or in the café. Also, the participants can choose which context is going to be referred to. The various elements can say something about what is feasible or unfeasible for the participants, their cultural or personal backgrounds, a statement about the political opinion of each one, or places where certain things are possible or not possible.

This example shows the scope for widening the field of possible contexts.
This system has a very firm structure, but via this straight mathematical construction the observer can find a lot of sense amid the shifting media. The friction with the unchanging structure allows the mind to construct spaces for more possibilities. The mind is making sense as ‘something’ between the actual and the possible.

‘FUNKTIONEN’

‘Funktionen’ is a toolbox. In this example, the composition is shared between a group of, for example, 5 participants. They rotate through various functions.

Observation
Interpretation
Mediation
Manipulation
Material

One possibility is that each participant prepares dance material for the function Material. This is contextualised and worked through by all the other functions, so that each participant knows the others’ material from all different perspectives and responsibilities.

Although the tendency is often to operate this system from a hierarchical orientation, it actually affords the possibility to work with shared-out, specialised responsibility for the whole. Transparency of shared processes is integral to the system; creating secrets usually makes for problems of misinterpretation.

Depending on how much time is spent, it can develop in the form of an autopoetic system, meaning a system that develops ‘by itself’. Of course there is no ‘by itself’. Each system stays in contact with others, even if this is done through exclusion, but ‘Funktionen’ has all the factors necessary for development: a language, reflection, communication, repetition, selection, interpretation, and modification.

The selection and creation of material, the contextualisation with themes, is all dependent on the participants. Another measure is to ask the participants to create their own system of a potentially autopoetic nature, or, if that is too difficult, a score of a dynamic nature with developing parameters.

A number of pieces have evolved from working with the system ‘Funktionen’ and the toolbox. Personally, I am happiest if the original parameters are not recognisable anymore – if working with ‘Funktionen’ results in a monster that I no longer understand.
Well, I hope you spotted my mistakes and I hope you have different opinions and ideas – so that we can now start arguing with one other.

Thank you.
Dance: between thought and motion

Politiken 15 August 2005, Section 2, page 2.

Janus Kodal
In the nineties, the German Thomas Lehmen gathered together all his ideas that had never become more than ideas and created the production distanzlos. It still works.

Thomas Lehmen: distanzlos. Guest performance at Dansescenen, 13 August.

In 1999 the 42-year-old German choreographer Thomas Lehmen did something many of his colleagues probably still envy him for. He took the whole heap of his stalled ideas and created a production out of the mess. It could have been called ‘A Hundred Small Beginnings’, but it is actually called distanzlos (Undistanced), lasts just under an hour and became his breakthrough. I understand why: at the Danish premiere the other day it still had a refreshing effect.

But was what Lehmen did really as easy as it looked? On stage he is undeniably nonchalant. A slim, dark-haired man in a loose shirt and jogging trousers whose movements seem almost involuntary – indeed tic-like. He shivers a little, starts reading out his notes, first gives you an introduction and then tells a basic story with words and simple, clear gestures. These are accounts of stalled projects, tentative efforts and ideas for performances that Lehmen never realised because of a lack of time, money or courage, as he says. But they are touching stories. And then, in dribs and drabs, you begin to understand how well conceived the composition actually is, how the big story is built up between Lehmen’s frame narratives and his empathy, between his thoughts and his movements.
The theoretical crux is the question Lehmen himself asks along the way: is this autobiography or not? If so, the subject portrayed is a composite of circumstances. For Lehmen is equally distanced (or undistanced, as the case may be) whether he is talking ‘about’ his project or in certain sequences ‘is’ the project – is swallowed up by it. It is the ironic distance from both ‘the artist of great ideas’ and ‘the artist of the failed realities’ that makes his method both comic and interesting. And precisely there, in this slippery field, Lehmen, as the title suggests, is undistanced from his work.

Art is art and everything else is everything else, it was said in the aesthetic eighties. That was not really so in the biographical nineties and is certainly not so now in the ‘noughties’, when there is a clear consciousness of the permeability of the subject. distanzlos is a portrait of precisely that – the perforated self.

The honesty of the performance consists of not postulating more than the ideas can bear. And still getting a great story out of it. The courage to start from scratch – without any large scenographic construct and without a limiting choreographic agenda – that is a quality that Thomas Lehmen has justifiably become famous for, and from which choreographers in this country can learn. It is a back-to-basics language that can speak sensitively without gushing; but it can only end up looking as playfully easy as this if the artist is profoundly at ease with the basics.
‘Through the expansion of new technologies, new places have emerged in virtual fields, so that our experience of space is now poised between the distant and the near, between an expansive virtual space and an unstable real.’

Adrian Heathfield
Elements of performance composition: time, space and embodiment
Adrian Heathfield
Looking at the work of performance and live artists over the last thirty years, it is possible to trace recurrent aesthetic and conceptual concerns that are of interest to us today in thinking through the creative possibilities of theatrical composition. Stretching across an artistic terrain far too complex and diverse to be summarised here, this essay seeks to isolate some of those concerns – the temporal, spatial and embodied dynamics of the live event – in order to tease out the questions they may pose, and those that we may repose, for contemporary experimental theatre practice.

**TIME**

The shocks to perception that are frequently deployed by contemporary Live artists take the spectator into conditions of immediacy where attention is heightened, the sensory relation charged, and the workings of thought agitated. The artwork is alive. Such conditions, it seems, bring us as spectators into a fresh relation: into the now of enactment, the moment by moment of the present. This encounter with and within time has marked the history of performance art from its diverse beginnings in the visual arts, theatre and in social practice. Performance and Live Art practice can be seen as having three significant historical roots: in visual art, theatre and in social ritual. In visual art from its beginnings in modernist movements such as Futurism, Dada and Situationism, to its emergence through Happenings and correspondence with Minimalism and Conceptual art, performance has consistently replaced or qualified the material object with a temporal act. Performance’s birth within and against theatrical form is equally rooted in an engagement with presence in the time of enactment and its disruptive potential in relation to fictive or narrative time. For those artists whose investment in performance emerges from or is directed towards its status
as social ritual, its capacity to connect distant times with the present, to slide into a liminal temporality, is one of its most vital elements.

Contemporary Live Art now employs many different forms of experimentation with time: diminishing the ‘known’ and rehearsed dynamics of performance by opening it to improvisation and chance; employing actions in ‘real time and space’; banishing, rupturing or warping fictional time and narration; scheduling works at ‘improper’ times; creating works whose time is autonomous and exceeds the spectator’s ability to witness the work; presenting the experience of duration through the body; deploying aesthetics of repetition that undo flow and progression; radically extending or shrinking duration beyond existing conventions.

The varied deployments of altered time in contemporary performance invariably bring the artwork towards the condition of eventhood. Whether it emerges from the clash of ‘real’ time with ‘fictional’ time, from an actual physical wounding or from the excessive density of enacted events, the charging of attention used by many contemporary Live artists brings the spectator into the present moment of the making and unmaking of meaning. This condition is often decidedly unstable and ambivalent, for whilst the artist’s or the spectator’s ‘presence’ in the moment may be a pre-requisite, the transient and elusive nature of this presence becomes the subject of the work. You really had to be there, as the saying goes. But often ‘being there’, in the heart of things, you are reminded of the impossibility of ever being fully present to oneself, to others or to the artwork. Eventhood allows spectators to live for a while in the paradox of two impossible desires: to be present in the moment, to savour it, and to save the moment, to still and preserve its power long after it has gone. This is a deliberate strategy for many Live artists, bringing the reception of the artwork into the elusive conditions of the real, where the relation between experience and thought can be tested and rearticulated.

Franko B’s various limit works are exemplary in this respect. Using his cut or opened body in particular exposures of duration, Franko stages simple but intensely charged performance events where the fact of wounding is placed within and against particular contexts of relation. His stunning piece I Miss You! 2003 takes place within the short duration of a specifically measured loss of blood. This bleeding trickles over a repetitious walk along a canvas laid like a catwalk before the spectators. Franko’s quietly compelling abjection, blood red against white, his mute spilling of his interior onto the surfaces before our eyes, makes it difficult for us to stand outside of the event. In the thrall of such events, as Tim Etchells has astutely articulated, we are more like witnesses than spectators, engaged in a vibrant relay between experience and thought, struggling in a charged present to accommodate and
resolve the imperative to make meanings from what we see. As Henry M. Sayre remarks on
the nature of duration, such artworks demand that we imaginatively re-make them.
What I find particularly interesting about Franko B’s work is the huge discrepancy between
the experience of the work through imaging and the experience of the work in the flesh.
As events Franko B’s works are often still, hushed, modest and softly contemplative, but
their rendition in image often amplifies their violence and spectacularity. The works are
often of very short durations (six to eight minutes of blood flow), but time itself seems to
stretch and slow here. In the time warp of the event human presence is placed in a particu-
lar tension with spectacle. One’s feelings and thoughts are caught in an inter-play between
the phenomenological fact of bleeding and the representational and symbolic structure of
the work. This tension is often simplified and collapses in the photographic still.

The broad tendency of contemporary performance towards immediacy, not just those prac-
tices based on physical limits, endurance or pain, enables artists to make works whose live
force is excessive. The aesthetic powers and cultural consequences of such moves are
often reduced by their popular miscomprehension within a generic notion of ‘shock tactics’,
which supposes a fixation on and superficial taste for the very moment of a spectator’s
‘trauma’. However, the interests of Live artists very rarely reside in this little scene of diffi-
culty, more in its implications and consequences, its complex course through conscious-
ness and out towards social and cultural values. Excessive performance tends to make evi-
dent that the event of its encounter, as the trauma theorists put it, is constituted by the col-
lapse of its understanding. In this way artists can create fissures or holes in perception and
interpretation, de-structuring thought, causing spectators to return repeatedly to the driven
but open question of the work’s statement. For many live artists this is a means to critique
cultural norms, fixed perceptions and sedimemented values as they pertain to the body, identi-
ity and society. By exposing the making of cultural beliefs and ideologies within the present,
they are marked as dependent upon a time: their contingency and instability is opened to
scrutiny. Look for instance at Forced Entertainment’s *Filthy Words and Phrases*, a seven-hour
durational performance for video rendered in an installation. The piece takes the form of the
simple act of chalking and erasing words on a blackboard: the text quoted here is drawn
from 2,000 cross-cultural obscene words and phrases culled from the Internet. Like many
of Forced Entertainment’s durational pieces this work employs a dynamic contradiction
between minimalist simplicity (one performer, chalk, a blackboard, the act of writing, the
act of looking) and maximalist proliferation (words). So here there is a tension and relay
between act and thought, presence and fantasy, body and sexuality. In *Filthy Words and
Phrases duration is used as a means to experience the exhaustion of language and its necessity and insufficiency in relation to the sexual. Duration is also the mechanism through which there is sometimes a laying-bare of the cultural values that are resident in this language.

But these performance moves are not just about subjecting the artwork to the vicissitudes and ravishes of time; they often take time itself as the subject of their address. Such experiences in and of performance make us aware that time itself is a product of structures of thought; that our perceptions and understandings of time are a cultural construct, and as such open to revision and change. In addressing and critiquing notions of time, performance is also able structurally to undermine some of the most enduring cultural forces and narratives of our time: the progress of ‘civilisation’, the accumulation of culture. The scrutiny that performance brings to temporality thus has a vital significance in the accelerated cultures of late capitalism. Here, time has become a commodity that is highly regulated: speed is the prime value, and time wasted is money lost. Frequently deploying a contemplative and ‘wasteful’ expenditure of time, performance continues its long wrangle with the forces of capital. Look for instance at the exemplary work of Tehching Hsieh who made an extraordinary series of one year performances in the early nineteen-eighties. In his One Year Performance known informally as the Time Piece (1980-81) Hsieh punched cards on a worker's time clock and took a still image of himself by the clock on a 16mm camera. He performed this action on the hour every hour for the duration of the year. The performance results in an exquisite filmic document in which we see Hsieh's body flickering and quivering through the passage of time. Here the labour of performance is brought into synchronicity with life practice and is counter-pointed with capitalised labour (‘clocking on’). The performance makes apparent that clock time is implicated in capitalism, that visual representation is equally a mechanism of capitalisation, and that these structures (capital, clock time, visual representation) cannot capture lived experience. Such uses of time provide an opportunity to de-habitualise and de-naturalise perceptions of time, to de-link the demands so prevalent in contemporary culture for instantaneous relationships between art and meaning, intention and realisation, desire and fulfilment. Performance can thus reintroduce less hasty understandings and modes of being. The powers that construct social knowledges and experiences of time inevitably try to hide and naturalise their force, to make invisible their operation upon people. Performance has become a vital means through which the nature and values of these powers may be contested, their regulatory grip loosened. In its attention to and playful subversion of the orders of time, performance gives
access to other temporalities: to time as it is felt in the body, time not just as progression and accumulation, but also as something faltering, non-linear, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted.

PLACE

Performance’s privileging and examination of time within the artwork, and within the spectator’s attention to it, has frequently been accompanied by an exploration of the dynamics of space. Though the phenomena of space and time are inseparable, discourse around space in terms of its form, operation and politics, has tended to dominate the critical writing on performance, if not its enactment and aesthetics. In the urban contexts of the West, public space has ceded to privatised space, where sociality is conditioned by a prevailing individualism and action is strictly regulated and surveyed. The moulding and containment of cultural space through the operations of place is increasingly exposed. Through the expansion of new technologies, new places have emerged in virtual fields, so that our experience of space is now poised between the distant and the near, between an expansive virtual space and an unstable real. These shifts in space and place have been the context and catalyst for performance to become ever more migratory, challenging the forces that try to locate it, leaving its institutional homes, running a restless and errant course into other places, other spheres of art and life, ‘siting’ itself wherever the necessities of expression, relation and finance dictate. In this emigration, performance has become a means through which to test the foundations and borders of identity, to bring the self into new relations with its ‘outsides’ and others. Having left home, performance has tirelessly proved its unrivalled capacity to generate new forms of relation, collaboration and community that negotiate and traverse once solid divisions.

Ever since artists in the late 1960s and early 1970s broke from the gallery-bound constraints of their immediate predecessors into other locales of creative practice, performance art has run a consistently close course with site-specific art in its investigation of the matter, conception and perception of space.¹ The continuing breakouts by artists from institutional places of performance production, whether in relation to galleries or theatres, is about a challenge to the propriety of place and its operation upon its inhabitants. Far from being neutral, place itself is seen by many Live artists as a restrictive force to be opened and resisted. Place is here the product of particular rationales or ideologies that order its architecture, the habitual practices, physical movements and social encounters that happen within it. Whether taking place in the streets, in parks, abandoned warehouses, stations, hotels,
schools, workplaces or domestic spaces, whether in urban contexts or in those places of ‘nature’ nominated as ‘other’ to the urban, performance is frequently employed as a means to test and transform space. Take for instance the numerous site-specific works of the British performance artist Bobby Baker, which unearth and articulate the nuances and experiences of everyday life. Baker mines the inner-life, object relations and micro-worlds of activities such as cooking, shopping and parenting, often in the very sites in which those experiences take place. Her *Kitchen Show*, which takes place in her own home, examines and re-frames situated ritual acts and in so doing enacts temporary transformations of this place and its associated practices. The reiteration of these acts in their ‘proper’ locale becomes a means of examining the neuroses and repressions of the situation and of its associated identities.

From highly formal artwork concerned with the aesthetic relations between bodies, movement and architecture, to the most charged agitations of activist art, performance is used as an intervention within social space and a means of re-articulating its constitution. In this play of bodies within space, performance is often an insertion of the improper or the incongruous within a specific place, and by this intervention a certain re-alignment and activation takes place, opening possibilities that were previously invisible or prohibited within social reality. Witness Stelarc’s now famous *Copenhagen Suspension* in which his prone body is pierced with eighteen meathooks and swung out across the cityscape by a tall crane. This spatial intervention creates two audiences, a kind of fissure in the social body: the informed volitional audience and the involuntary accidental. In the process Stelarc gives back to the cityscape, to architecture, a fragile image of pain, beauty and transcendence, but one based on industrial haulage. Performance tends to operate by means of displacement, subverting or usurping places, unlocking their formation, questioning the thoughts, discourses and nominations by which place is solidly constituted. Performance enacts a felt and interrogative transgression of boundaries, a process of breaching that throws into question the very oppositions by which place is formed. The performance intervention re-orders space and relation, often calmly interjecting that which has been violently excluded or forgotten in a place. In this way a set of emotional, psychological and political associations that cohere around spatial divisions may be revealed and challenged: the present and the absent, the inside and the outside, the private and public, the urban and the wild, the restrained and the free, what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘theirs’.

In the contracted spaces of global culture, notions of place and the borders that constitute them have been profoundly breached, destabilising the identities that were founded on their
integrity. As national and cultural borders are opened, other ways of being and thinking are encountered, differences assimilated, accommodated or often aggressively repelled. Performance operates by a performing subject testing out his or her relation to a site; as such it is the test-site of belonging. Performance enables artists and spectators – made inseparable from each other – to experience and to think the extent to which a given identity, or indeed subjectivity itself, is moored to a physical place or its discursive determinants. This is to question the extent to which a subject may take leave of the bounds of place.

EMBODIMENT

Performance and Live Art’s trajectories of experimentation with time and space have necessarily involved the exploration, use and examination of the human body. Stepping away from the representation of the human subject found in portraiture and the depiction of the artist found in the self-portrait, twentieth-century artists increasingly stepped inside the frame, using their own bodies as sites of experimentation and expression. The emergence of this gesture through the various movements of modernism has been traced, alongside its manifestation as a strong genre of Body Art from the late 1960s to the present. The correlation between performance art and ‘the moving body’ of dance, rooted in the minimalist aesthetics of experimental choreographers of the 1960s and 1970s, also continues in the present, with practices such as those of Jérôme Bel, La Ribot, Xavier Le Roy, Jonathan Burrows, Boris Charmatz and Goat Island. This last Chicago-based collective of artists make elaborate collage-like compositions of gestural, textual and sonic fragments. Their work though clearly highly choreographic, sits uneasily between action-based performance and dance. Working with recovered and physicalised memory fragments, this company enacts a kind of alternate commemorative practice or somatic testimony. Contemporary performance continues its trajectory of incorporation, whereby the artist’s body, its adornments, its action and its residues are not just the subject, but also the material object of art. The physical entry of the artist’s body into the artwork is a transgressive gesture that confuses the distinctions between subject and object, life and art: a move that challenges the proprieties that rest on such divisions. Performance explores the paradoxical status of the body as art: treating it as an object within a field of material relations with other objects, and simultaneously questioning its objectification by deploying it as a disruption of and resistance to stasis and fixity. The body’s entry into the frame ensures that the artist’s exploration of the meanings and resonances of contemporary embodiment will be received in and through an intersubjective, phenomenal relation.
In particular the use of the artist's body has been brought to question the relation between self and other. For artists such as Marina Abramovic, whose practice has been at the forefront of performance within the visual art sphere since the 1970s, this has meant an elemental investigation of the psychological and somatic dynamics of intimate human relation. More recently Abramovic's work has pursued this exploration of self and other across the performer-spectator ‘divide’. Take for instance her work with Ulay, *Breathing In Breathing Out* 1977 in which the couple cycle breath between each other’s bodies in a sealed kiss. What interests me about this piece is the deep ambivalence it both enacts and creates. The kiss is turned into a physical image of utter interdependence and parasitism. Love is figured as poison. As in much of Abramovic's early work the question of self and other is posed in terms of the responsibility of the audience: as Ulay and Abramovic become less conscious, what is our role and relation to them? The spatial divide is precisely what performance puts into question, interrogating the often unspoken contract that exists between the two parties, and the ethical, moral and political notions upon which it is founded. This embodied scene of relation is a zone of unpredictable exchange where the senses, emotions and intellect are put at risk. Abramovic's work, like that of many live artists has repeatedly engaged with physical risk and its resonances through consciousness and out towards the cultural-political sphere. Such investigations invoke the relations of power between self and other, and as a consequence, the dynamics of pleasure and pain, desire and repulsion, love and hatred that traverse this relation. The artist's body is de-naturalised and used as a mutable object in these charged performance experiments. Its borders, actions and appearances are often forcefully manipulated and transformed in order to reflect the violent forces at play within embodied relation.

The performing body is often presented as a site of contestation between two opposing dynamics: as a passive recipient of inscription by social institutions, cultural discourses, ideologies and orders of power, and as an active agent through which identity and social relation may be tested, re-articulated and re-made. This paradoxical dynamic resonates throughout a range of contemporary performances. It is highly evident in the work of Orlan for instance. Clearly what we are faced with in Orlan’s surgical reconstruction of her own features according to an eclectic mix of feminine archetypes and her extension of these features to a point of excess, is the question of political reiteration. To what extent does this work reiterate the very orders of patriarchal power that it is attempting to critique. For me this work’s political and critical capacity is most evident in the event of the operations, where we see Orlan via elaborate structures of mediation, speaking as she is operated upon:
contesting the opinions and interpretations that are placed upon her action through these media, within the happening of the event.

Technological development has also profoundly impacted on the status, imaging and conception of the body within contemporary culture. It too is increasingly surveyed and opened by technologies, becoming a site whose construction in and through culture is evidently in question. As the cultural milieu of Western late capitalist societies is ever more densely mediated and unreal, the body might seem to offer the remaining ground through which the real may be encountered and felt. But however elemental, this ‘real body’ is often the very subject in question in performance. Live Art, with its history of testing physical and psychological limits, its persistent focus on the performing body, offers itself as a primary site where the impulses of the broader culture towards corporeal integrity and its dissolution may be played out. In this somatic test-site, performance presents and interrogates transformations of the base-matter and foundational meanings of fleshly existence.

NOTES


Space and composition.

Conceptual thinking and theatre making

Torunn Kjølner and Rolf Alme
Concept art often includes action. Concept art speaks with rather big letters. Concept art is, if we are to believe Michael Fried,\textsuperscript{1} theatrical art or even a literal form of art. For Fried, it is a reason why concept art is not really art at all. For us, concept art is a great inspiration because imbedded in it, we find the art and craft of making clear statements. In order to show a visual or spatial approach to theatre, we start with the thinking behind concept art.

\textbf{THEATRE, SPACE, AND COMPOSITION}

It is true that theatre is unthinkable without a space. So we see theatre. It is visual. Does that mean that theatre art is visual art? We do not think so. It is not the fact that theatre happens in a particular space (the stage) that qualifies it as visual art. Neither is it the fact that theatre is heard as sounds and composed in time that qualifies it as music. A quick look at how the classical art forms; fine arts, music, writing/literature, dance and theatre have entered the twenty-first century, we want to point out a couple of facts. The field of music art has developed into several established forms or genres. Most European countries have two (or more) types of music academies (one for classical music, one for rhythmical music). The same is true for dance; there is classical dance (ballet) and modern dance (in many variations). As for the fine arts, the definitions of what are understood, as the art form is even more ‘unstable’. What used to be classical painting (two dimensional visual art) and sculpture (three dimensional visual art) have been blended, merged, and fused with design, video art, installation art, scenography... Literature used to have the written word as a main ‘material’ for its different genres, but as the computer has entered the field, words are not just written letters any more. The computer can exhibit the process of writing merged with images, interactive plots and so on. Completely new fields of artistic writing have developed.
The theatre has always been characterised as a meeting place of many art forms. But what does it mean today? Do we have a (professional) classical theatre and a (professional) ‘modern’ or ‘rhythmic’ or ‘installation’ or ‘technology’ theatre? We do and we do not. There are of course, the entertainment genres of theatre. And here we think of musicals, comedy, stand up, etc. But that would go for all other art forms as well. Then there is the possibility to seeing film as a twentieth-century theatre form. There is, however, little tradition and little reason for doing this, especially because most trained film actors are trained at theatre schools, and most film dramaturgies converge with most classical theatre dramaturgies.

Compared with other art forms then, theatre can be seen as rather conservative and self-protective. The twentieth century saw many theatre experiments, of course. Exercises in laboratories and performances that have attacked every single element of the classical idea of theatre: the plot, the character, the space, the hierarchy, etc., basically variations of a quest to get away from representation. Thus experimental theatre has become a subculture with its own terminology. What is interesting is that these experiments are still considered as experiments by the art institution we call theatre. This is most obvious in the theatre schools, where the quest for new forms and professional experiments seems to have been swallowed by a very strong demand to learn the Profession. Contrary to the academies of fine arts, the state-supported schools have preserved, rather than deconstructed and debated, the tradition of learning a craft defined as one particular profession. There are many reasons for this. It seems obvious, that it is difficult for the institution of theatre to exchange its main artistic material, the human being, with other kinds of materials. It is equally obvious that it is difficult to even think of theatre as a non-representative or abstract art form. So in order to stay contemporary, the theatre has focused on the development of the human mind and body. As Joseph Roach shows clearly in his study *The Players Passion,* theories of acting closely follow the development of psychological theory and its way into a general understanding of human behaviour and conditions. Since classical theatre also pays a heavy dept to literature, the development of dramatic writing has followed general developments in writing. In this way, the theatre seems to have been busy with a task of forever engaging in updating itself with reference to contemporary psychology (and sociology) as well as to contemporary literature.
We did get ‘performance theatre’ of course. Being aware that this term does not make much sense in the English language, we point out that we use ‘performance theatre’ in the Scandinavian understanding of the term. Performance theatre focuses more on the act of performing, less on the written word, more on the presence and actual performance quality of the performers/actors, less on the playing of a role or pretending to be a particular character or portraying particular emotions. The term ‘performance theatre’ has neither become a very operative term for this ‘other theatre(s)’ and it is only very lately that performance theatre (or rather the kind of theatre it refers to) is being considered as a professional theatre form in its own right in Scandinavia in the same way as we see classical music vs. jazz for instance. We are not lamenting this, only pointing out the difficulty of talking about different concepts of theatre without falling into the trap of describing things negatively, as something that classical theatre is not and thereby being dragged into the terrible rhetoric of what is new (and good) and what is old (and boring). If we have a mission here, it is only to point out that one can think of theatre as more than one art form and therefore also see more than one very defined profession involved in e.g. directing and performing actions in a theatre space. So we see several professional ways of creating theatre art.

Looking at theatre as concept art can be seen as an attempt to enter the contemporary theatre scene through a back door and still end on stage. On this stage we still want to make theatre. Doing so as a profession, we (re)think theatre and define it as a *composition of elements in time and space*. This marks a difference in the approach to theatre similar to the approach to composition of modern music, which is based on sounds rather than tones prescribed from notes. This difference might, or might not, be noticed by the audience. That is irrelevant. The same applies to composed or devised theatre. The main focus is on the composition of elements and its main references are space and time, rather than the staging of representative actions and words. Just as all music audiences go to a concert, all theatre audiences go to see performances. So, we suggest starting to forget about ‘performance theatre’ as ‘something else’ and rather understand theatre as an art field that contains several forms of theatre art.

Theatre as a composition of elements in time and space

To think of theatre as elements in time and space does not mean that we want to exclude actors, performers, roles, words, dramatic structure, etc from our understanding of theatre art. We enjoy all kinds of (good) theatre and see no reason to oppose it as such. Neither
does it mean that we want to merge all elements into one big Wagnerian unity, where the function of each element is to hide in each other’s shadow. Seeing theatre as space and composition means to look for how which components can be related to each other. All art forms consist of artificially related elements; colours, textures, forms (space-based art forms), sounds, beats, words, etc, (time-based art forms). With the compositional elements of theatre art at hand (body, movement, walking, running, dancing, different uses of limbs, eyes, spine, turning, rolling, etc., action, reaction, eyes, speech, words, text, lines, sonority, timbre, rhythm, tempo, beat, space, light, atmosphere, etc., etc.) any theatre production must prioritise selected elements and their relations.

Thinking about theatre, white westerners (since there is some cultural specificity in our concepts) immediately bring actors and actions exhibited on a stage to mind. In terms of relations between elements, theatre is first thought of as relations between human beings. The prototypical theatrical composition is recognised as a series of actions and reactions on some kind of cause and effect (plot-based) line. The composition is understood as a dramaturgical structure, which means that it focuses actions (drama = Greek for action, plus (Greek) ergon; work, workings, effect). The prototypical drama is structured as elements (roles or functions) in conflicting opposition: the protagonist (who wants something, has a 'project') against the antagonist (who wants something else) and with a concluding end of the conflict. Going through the elements of the conflict, the roles can change and the people who play the roles can gain insight. The prototypical space for the prototypical drama is a social space, or rather a represented specific place, where people meet through exchange of words, actions, emotions, and insights. There is a prototypical timeline for a theatre experience, a five-part development of some length, or just enough time for the roles to unfold, their desires to be perceived by the audience as conflicts and the time it takes to solve this conflict. The condensed theatrical time (sometimes called fictional time) corresponds to a more real time; the time the audience can be expected to sit down watching the actors act.

So, we could opt for the term prototypical theatre to refer to this form. However, to make the classification more flexible (also including several variations of the prototype) we suggest adding to this concept the buildings that are constructed to contain the plays performed, and the audience watching. The stage (for the actors) is lit by theatre lamps, and furnished with furniture, structures, props, or objects that are especially chosen for the purpose of being exhibited with the performers on a stage. The prototypical players play roles in a play written by a playwright. The prototypical audience is seated on chairs, and sits in the dark as long as the stage is lit.
To make things very simple, we suggest a broad term for these variations as *theatre in theatres*.

Theatre in theatres is produced by several people with different professions: some artists, some not: playwright, director, dramaturge, scenographer, actor, actress, light designer, etc. The production of theatre in theatres is framed by substantial organisational and artistic practice and experience, as well as through methods of rehearsals that are proven to reach results on deadlines. The number of weeks allocated to reach a performance of a normal length (2 – 3 hours) differs a little bit from country to country, normally no less than five weeks or no more than ten weeks' production time with a whole crew involved (Castorf did the six-hour-long The Idiot in five weeks, but that is another story).

Focusing on the relational composition of elements in space and time, theatre can also happen ‘everywhere else’. ‘Theatre everywhere else’ can re-think, re-value and re-arrange the relational hierarchies of elements. The concept of theatre everywhere else’ can be thought of as ‘visual theatre’ (leaning towards installations and performance art), ‘physical theatre’ (leaning towards dance) ‘composed theatre’ (leaning towards music and painting) ‘ambient theatre’ (leaning towards daily life and its rituals), etc.

A meaningful term that matches the linguistic level as e.g. prototypical theatre seems difficult. We have decided to stick to ‘devised theatre’. It is not the best term, but we find it slightly more neutral than the German term suggested by Hans Ties-Lehmann, *post-dramatic theatre*. This term suggests a historical development, almost a paradigmatic change that, leaves dramatic theatre ‘behind’, which we do not really find operative. We suggest that one understands ‘devised theatre’ rather literally as a performance that is ‘made up’ ‘contrived,’ ‘invented’ for the purpose of being performed in a particular context.

Producing theatre art includes reflection on context and given circumstances, i.e. frames of production. We distinguish between *theatre in theatres* and *theatre everywhere* because it is our experience that the theatre in theatres leans heavily on methods imbedded with prototypical theatre thinking. So there are prerequisites such as: actors trained at state-supported theatre schools, who according to their contracts are engaged to play roles in plays written by playwrights, directed by directors and this is to happen in spaces made by scenographers, etc. Costumes, props, sound, lights etc. are normally planned before a production process start, but in practice *added* to the actions very late in the process. Meanwhile the
actors rehearse pretending to be in costumes, pretending to sit in expensive sofas, pretending to listen to music, etc. The way of relating components to each other is almost given in productions of theatre in theatres. One has to make a very big effort to break the production strategy of a theatre and the adhering hierarchic structure of status and decision-making. The hierarchy of values as to which elements are more important than others is perhaps not given as such, but practice makes it difficult to break it. So the relationships between the actors are seen as vital, whereas the relation between the light and the texture of the wall hardly gets any attention. In the rehearsal process there is one main reference; the play or the script, or more correctly, the director’s interpretation or conceptualisation of the play.

*Theatre elsewhere* does not necessarily take a different approach, but in principle, there are no organisational structures or conventions that bend a production towards an interpretation of a written text. When one person, some people, or a whole company devise rules as tools for making decisions and rehearsal strategies, it is (more) possible to rethink theatre as a composition of elements in time and space. Devising structures for organising the production process must become an element in the consideration of the production of theatrical or aesthetical meaning. As a methodological approach to theatre production, devising basically asks for transparency throughout the process of working. In principle, nothing can be taken for granted and as such there is an opportunity to rethink the theatrical conventions.

In practice, devised theatre or theatre everywhere else have established cultures and conventions of productions with their own values and hierarchies, just like theatre in theatres. Still, devised theatre asks for strategies of theatrical communication through other means, which is why we will look at devised theatre as a possible approach to make theatre professionally without getting stuck with The Theatre Profession.

To sum up, we see theatre as an art form with the potential to vary which relations between which elements that are to be given focus and artistic attention.

What we will share with you here are some reflections of what happens if we, broadly speaking, allow concept art, or rather conceptual visual thinking, to guide a theatre production to function as a composition of visual and audible elements in time and space.
CONCEPTUAL THINKING

Concept art is probably best (if at all) known from its use of concrete non-art objects and its clear statements. The paradigmatic example, drawn to our attention time and time again, is the famous pissoire, signed Mutt, that the painter, Marchel Duchamps anonymously managed to exhibit as an object of art in an American art museum in 1917.\(^5\) Having debated and reheated the rise, fall and rise again of art and its objects, painting was seen reduced to two-dimensional flatness, sculptures to minimal form, etc. and visual artists and art theorists cleared the way for visual art to become exhibitions of ideas, formed and commented on through art objects or just objects to be seen as art, things made by others and for other purposes with the signature of the artist added almost as a comment.

When called for inspiration to rethink theatre as a composition of elements in time and space from concept art, it is not so much the use of objects and concrete means that has triggered our thinking, even if it is exciting to see how human beings, or human actions, can be seen as ‘readymades’ for being presented on a platform and seen as theatre. What really triggers our thinking of theatre as concept art is more the courageous action of creating statements that characterise this kind of art. Conceptual thinking means to give the idea, the concept, or the analytical thought high priority. To make it ‘readable’ means, in practical terms, to see it with the eye of the viewer rather than acting it out through a feeling (or through representing an emotion) from within the actor. Transposed to a rehearsal situation, it means to ask what an action (for example a fast and fiery exit) looks like and can be seen as in the theatrical context, rather than to ask what it feels like to leave a room in this or that way, and what one (as a human being) would do if one was in such a situation.

Our point is simply that the well-known expression: ‘It works, keep it!’ must have one or the other staging principle as the overruling reference, even if it is thinkable that the famous ‘it works’ would be the same for both references in this particular exit. In other words, each hierarchy of value references relates or creates its logic of rehearsal. For actors it can be difficult to see and understand the logics (or lack of it) in a performance when the director mixes terminologies from different concepts of theatre or even dilutes these terms by mixing them with everyday language and common sense observations.

Words are important production means in theatre art. Directors try them out, often lots of them, in order to find some that move the actors in the direction he or she wants to go. One does not, however, find a lot of reflection about the relation between rehearsal terminology and aesthetical results in theatre art. Since our everyday language is already rather
heavily influenced by Freudian psychology (and a rather romantic understanding of what it means to be an artist), and since the preconceptions of theatre are rather heavily informed by the hegemony of emotion and motivation, it is, however, difficult to rethink the concept of theatre without rethinking the terminology one uses to produce it.

**WHAT IS A CONCEPT?**

This is not the place to unfold a discussion of the word concept, or even the concept of concept. So concept art is really only a limited reference when we opt for conceptual thinking in theatre production. From a more philosophical point of view, Deleuze and Guattari⁶ seem interesting partners to visit when searching for a creative understanding of concept. In their book *What is philosophy?* There is a chapter called ‘What is a concept?’ One should quote the whole chapter to pay due attention to the understanding of concept creation as a vital key, perhaps the Key, in the history and practice of philosophy, so we will leave it to the reader to investigate this. It is rather obvious that Deleuze and Guattari want to be the creators of creating concepts, but I might be wrong. From a pragmatic (artistic) point of view, the enlightening understanding of their concept creation is that thinking is seen as a creative action, indeed similar to the creative actions artists perform when they create works. Deleuze and Guattari look for concepts philosophers have created that have changed the world, or at least changed our way of thinking about the world. For example Platon created the concept of ‘idea’. Believing that theatre practice can do with concept creation on a more ‘local level’, one can start by looking at what it takes to make a concept. According to Deleuze and Guattari a concept consists of several components. A singular concept is unthinkable. Each of these components could in turn be central to other concepts. A concept then can be seen as a ‘neighbourhood’ of components, some central, and some more peripheral. Together they make up a flexible unity, where the borders are neither completely clear nor completely unclear. To understand, or acknowledge something as a concept then, must mean that one thinks conceptually when one understand a ‘universe’ or a ‘space’ as a mental reference that somehow hold its components together.

Conceptualising a play, as we know it from theatre practice in theatres, broadly speaking means to interpret a written play and work out strategies for translating a particular interpretation for stage use. In order to do so, the director, or the ensemble, need to conceptualise not only a thematic interpretation but also some kind of an image or notions of what the performance is going to look and feel like in terms of scenography, styles of speaking, acting, costume design, atmosphere, etc. Such a conceptualisation can be seen as a
creation in its own right and at the same time it may be strong enough to function as a strategy for the rehearsal process. Such conceptualisations are made by a director, sometimes in cooperation with the scenographer, sometimes supported by a dramaturge. A conceptualisation of a play can be made based on advanced methods of analysis of the text, such as the Stanislavskij-based action analysis,7 the so called Penka8 method, or other versions of dramaturgical analysis that, give the director and the production team a clear overview of how the actions structure the plot, the characters, the theme, the space, and its atmospheres etc. in a notion of a forthcoming performance.

Theatre is, as we understand it, an art form that relates elements in a space, but theatre relies also on addition of elements, in the sense that the audience read and experience the elements as added information. The space provides visual and spatial information and atmosphere for the actions that happen there, but how can it be kept alive as an element to relate to throughout the performance?

Relating actions or moving bodies to a space as a series of readable images, demands an analytical and even a rhetorical (effect-orientated) approach to the rehearsal procedure. Relating space and moving images to a flow of auditive information is not easy, but it is doable. Adding more elements such as voice, words, light, objects, makes it more difficult to create an artistically interesting, but still readable, performance in a space. Artistically one sees the challenge as a question of finding an interesting balance between complete order and total chaos, between an overtly clear statement and a totally vague suggestion. Rehearsals are used to find such balances. Some rehearsal methods focus mainly on how the actor through his or her interpretation of the text can ‘play against it’, which means to add, detract, vary and surprise themselves and others through the way they walk, speak and act the text. Other rehearsal methods focus more on other things, such as interaction between the actors, acting as real reaction, relating to the audience, on physical (or metaphysical) presence, etc.

So, working with theatre is complicated. To see (or make) a performance, where all elements are related in the best of ways in the best of spaces and on the best timeline, is nothing but a miracle. For the audience, theatre is usually experienced as an ongoing action line or as a plotline that unfolds in front of you. This demands both a memory of what has been seen or heard, and a notion of what might come. It is possible to break with the expectation that a theatre performance moves forward in time and gains meaning by and through the means used, but it is difficult to make it in an artistically interesting way. Indeed, experimen-
tal theatre (theatre in theatres and theatre elsewhere), has been — and is — toiling with what rules to break in what way without losing it all. Thinking of theatre as concepts or statements added in sequences and glued together through visual and audible logic is but one way of rethinking the hierarchy of related elements in theatre. In order to do this, it is important to create concepts as operative rehearsal references. It is important how you start, of course, but what is more important is which direction you take when you have started. One can start with a classic text — and end with a theatrical composition that is driven by forces other than the plotted intrigues of the characters in the drama. This is very much what happens when Castorf stages his classics at Volksbühne in Berlin. The links to the plot of the original text can be vague (e.g. *Endstation Amerika*) or at least not very important, even if you hear (or see) most of the lines from the text spoken (*Forever Young*). The relation of elements in time and space are driven forward by the logic of the actors’ sound production and actions. There are dramatic obstructions to this in the space and the objects related to the space. The words, one feels, are almost just there to have something to relate the sounds to. One can also start with virtually nothing and end up with a plotted play, which is usually what happens in a Mike Leigh film or performance made on his methods of improvisation. One can also start with space.

**Spatial thinking**

Creating a space, functional or fictional, is an act of ‘necessity’. A space has a purpose. It is built for a particular use. Creating a space for theatrical use, i.e. a scenography, means looking for use-value as well as for effect-value. The space is a constitutive element of theatre. The first phase is trying to conceptualise a space that can be used and exhibited as an element in an artwork, and to be clear about how staging this material in this space will affect the performance, the actors, the director, the light designer, and the audience. One will perhaps start by looking for some kind of common ground or some or unknown ground, and mentally begin testing the material (a text, a concept, a collective of people, an idea, and an experiment) against the space or universe one has in mind. That theatre can be made from spatial concepts is ‘proved’ by people such as Robert Wilson, Ejnar Schleef, Aachim Freyer, Robert Lepage, and others. In Scandinavia, Kirsten Delholm is the prototype of this kind of theatre maker. What these people have in common is that they started as visual artists and ended up as directors or rather auteur of their own work. Other versions of stage creators paying debt to the spatial setting are Marthaler and Anna Viebrock, who work closely together in devising stage actions and performances that link their visual and musical competences with the work of actors. Still, theatre is an art form that relies heavily on
language and other socially coded communicative procedures to happen. This is obvious both during the process of creation and as it is received by an audience.

We are aware that any specified terminology carries both potentials and restrictions from the tradition it is lifted from. The concept ‘space’ is a good example. Just as we have seen different ‘turns’ such as a ‘linguistic turn’ or a ‘pragmatic turn’, it seems that the growth of the Internet has promoted some kind of ‘spatial turn’. A tendency to see everything as text has gained a partner in seeing almost everything as space: cyberspace being the prototype example. Philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and others have contributed greatly to extending our understanding of space and spatial experience. So space has got a hot relationship with ‘universe’, while it seems to have left ‘place’ rather cold. Space is understood more as a metaphor than as a concrete something, which of course also effects how we think and talk about actual space and artistically created spaces e.g. in the theatre. In a philosophical and creative hierarchy, space seems to take a position above place. Why? A question we do not need to answer as artists. How is, however, a question that needs an artistic answer. Creating spaces rather than places represents a working method that takes the interplay between a concrete place and a universe where actions take place as a *sine qua non*.

We work from a simple phenomenological notion that everything is space in the sense that any experience in and with the world is more or less unthinkable without a space. If we think about everyday spatial experience as three dimensional or architectural – an experience in space, it becomes clear that the experience of a play happening on a theatre stage is of a different kind. A stage setting is made with an audience in mind. The actual effect the space has on the actors is normally not brought forward as an issue, whereas the actual placing of things in the space must be adjusted to the fact that actors are – and represent – human form. So the architecture of the stage is made to affect the senses and perception of the audience. Creating performances from visual thinking and spatial experience means understanding that space can have several functions in a performance.

**FUNCTIONAL SPACE**

Most people seem to react to the space they enter in everyday life as readers of what function the particular space has. This means that most spaces are immediately interpreted as in terms of their functions. When we enter an apartment, we immediately read it as somebody’s home and we navigate in its smaller spaces according to what function each place has. Each room communicates what kind of action that normally takes place in rooms like
this. The room we enter seems to have been set up to expect something particular from the user of the room. It seems important to notice that everyday rooms usually communicate their normal functions very clearly. A toilet in the living room or a bed in the kitchen might create an immediate uneasiness. Second thoughts might be more emotional or sensational. The home might feel very nice or not so nice. You would normally be able to read quite a lot about the people living there: about their taste, their financial situation, whether they have children or not, if they are intellectuals, what kind of books they read, or are there no books? Are they relaxed people with an old comfortable sofa or more into aesthetics and design with transparent plexi glass chairs?, Are they interested in art?, Are there artworks on the walls or not?, Do they like colours?, Do they like candle lights?, Do they shut their curtains, etc.? We all know that we read homes like that whether we want to or not. To some extent, we read people’s clothes in the same way. Before we get to know people, our only way to frame them into our individual system of understanding is by reading what they look like. As clothes in our culture represent an individual expression of taste, and an expression of what kind of social group we want to belong to, clothes are the most immediate and concrete sign we give.

Let’s go back to the apartment. So a space with a table and chairs around is immediately interpreted in terms of its function: It is a place to eat, a dining room. This room might turn out to be the place everybody meets, where things happen. It might provide the user with a good – or not so good – feeling to be in the space. It might have an atmosphere one likes or dislikes. Some might start asking themselves why, but few have a vocabulary ready to analyse what it is that creates the particular atmosphere. If asked, some might answer that it is because they like the people that live there, for some it could be the smell of the tasty food that is served, the warmth from the fire place, the style of the furniture, the colours, the height of the ceiling, the light, the size, etc. In other words, the experience of spatial atmosphere is a complex mixture of sensations, where sound, smell, and personal biography might matter on equal terms with the actual spatial experience.

When creating a space, an architect, a scenographer or a decorator activates and singles out elements of a space in order to imagine and foresee the effects each element and the combination of them might have on the user. It is our conviction, though, that function provides us with an overruling gaze, and that this functional gaze needs to be challenged to understand why it seems very difficult to create spaces that call for interesting emotional response and analytical reflection. Few of us have heard someone say: ‘When I entered their apartment I came into this soft, mild space characterised by a peaceful light-green atmos-
phere accompanied with yellow flickering light and a smooth humming sound. I felt very safe and calm there.’ This could be an emotional reading of someone’s living room. Our point is that we are not used to these kinds of descriptions from our daily life and therefore it is difficult for us both to design and to read spaces beyond the functional level.

There are differences and similarities in creating functional spaces and theatrical spaces. We see three rather different kinds of spaces that can be used as stages for actions.

**REPRESENTATIVE SPACE**

The key word in thinking about representative space is recognition. Creating recognisable space builds on references to other spaces. The real world – or how we normally perceive it – sets the rules for the light, textures, materials, architectural styles, proportions, etc. A representative space seems real (and therefore good) when it corresponds on all levels with its counterpart or reference in the real world. In some cases the representative space and the real space can be the same as in film scenes shot on location. In film production, a tradition or a craft of mixing the real and the copy of the real has been developed to perfection. In live performance productions the ‘site-specific theatre’ can be an example of the use of the actual real space as a representation of itself.

From an architectural or scenographic point of view, a representative space is representative because it is conceived as a functional setting for a particular plot or specific actions. The space is not supposed to be interpreted as an artistic element of its own. It might not even be important to notice it for anything other than information, as is often the case in many classical play productions.

**METAPHORICAL OR SYMBOLIC SPACE**

Metaphorical or symbolic space has lots of elements in common with representative space. The difference is that metaphorical spaces are created to be the reference or the conceptualisation of the performance. We are aware that it would probably be true to say that the spatial setting in every successful performance would stand up to metaphorical analysis. But since we focus on the creation of space, we want to insist that it differs a lot whether you think in terms of a functional setting of an action or whether you think metaphorically.

Thinking metaphorically for us means focusing on a specific communicative value in the space. The space is not only the natural environment of the action, for example the kitchen where one prepares food; it is the kitchen or the very special space where the food is pre-
pared this time. One example from classical theatre could be Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’ that takes place in the Italian city of Verona. Focusing on the creation of an architectural environment corresponding with the time of Shakespeare and the architectural style of Verona would be purely representative. A conceptualisation of the text saying it tells us something about the condition of love in a society marked by civil war, and the need of a spatial frame or scenography for this conceptualisation, could give different solutions: One could create the architectural environment in such a way that you see the space is marked by war, traces of battle, neglect, decay, etc. making it the special Verona of civil war. In this example the signs of battle would act as the metaphorical framework for the interpretation of the love story and thus communicate that both the geographical setting and the special time of Shakespeare are of minor interest compared with the idea of a society at war. If one wanted a society at war to attract even more attention one could create an environment of a weapon factory, a battle field or even a concrete place of civil war of today (Iraq or Palestine) and thereby influence the spectator through a constant reminder of contemporary conflicts. The communicative value of the space is not representative or functional but thematic; it is not the fact that something takes place in Verona that is interesting, but that it takes place in a condition of war.

So space can be used clearly and metaphorically to communicate a particular conceptualisation of the play. The space is created as a universe that can ‘hold’ the thematic material. Such interplay between action and space can be more or less anticipated by the text. What matters is that one can see how the space or metaphorical universe becomes a main reference for the production of aesthetical meaning.

It is possible to transform realistic references or spaces into metaphorical spaces by focusing on, exaggerating or twisting specific elements such as size, colours, textures, proportions, etc. or create spaces by putting together elements from different representational spaces, as Anna Viebrock does in her collaboration works with Marthaler.

FORMAL SPACE

Space can be created as pure form or geometry and function, as a world of logic for theatrical material and actions. Formal space follows compositional logic known from architecture or visual arts, where colours, texture, proportions, levels, weight, lines, etc. are composed and related internally. The reference is not (usually) to something outside of the space, but the elements refer to each other and make up some kind of unity. The effect formal space has on the actors or the audience happens on a formal and atmospheric level, and may not
be immediately readable. If we return to our example of the story about Romeo and Juliet in the society of war, one could also communicate this with the use of a formal space. One could think of a space where the surfaces are of steel and where the geometry of the place is obviously not conceived for human beings but rather for large machines or guns. If the actors’ movements are restricted by the space, if the whole metal space expresses aggression and is so big that the human beings are small, if the surfaces and the forms are dangerous, sharp, if the actors risk falling, stumbling over metal constructions, if the light is strong and uncomfortable, if the sounds of the steps on the metal are exaggerated, etc. one can communicate some of the same feeling of war, violence, inhumanity as in the metaphorical spaces with realistic references. Formal and geometrical spaces can gain communication value when related to words, sounds, actions, and movement. Formal or geometrical spaces often influence the acting style or the movements of the actors. One advantage of formal spaces is that one can work more in the way of a visual artist or even an architect and use the quality of the material, the colour, the texture, and the geometry to communicate the desired feeling or ambience. One also ‘jumps over’ the problems of concrete references. Our example of Romeo and Juliet shows this clearly. If one makes a space representing civil war in Verona in the time of the text, one has said nothing more than Shakespeare. If one makes a space of civil war in Iraq as the setting for the play, it becomes very specific and the specificity of the Iraq war easily becomes the overruling communication of the performance. If one makes a space of a general war zone it is the phenomena of love and war on general terms that is communicated. If one makes a formal space as mentioned with aggressive metal walls and danger, it is not necessarily war as such that we communicate but love in contrast to something hostile, aggressive, inhuman, thus opening the range of interpretation within our conceptual reading of the play. One can be specific but without being too narrow.

The ‘problem’ with the use of formal space is once again that most people are not used to reading pure form. The analytical or emotional reading of formal architecture and visual art is not as natural for most people as the reading of consumer objects and concrete references such as furniture and clothes in a psychological and social perspective. Working with theatre and understanding it as a composition of formal elements should make it easier to use formal space, though. We are freer as actors to use expressionistic movements, to integrate dance, acrobatics, to create extreme images, to use sound, to decompose the text, etc. By using formal space, we enter a modernistic art tradition that seeks greater freedom. In this tradition, one tries to avoid the ‘fake’, meaning both the two-dimensional painted
decorations of the 19th century and the three-dimensional fake spaces of the 20th century (like a realistic factory building with concrete walls that everyone knows is made out of painted wood panels).

Working with formal space gives the freedom to work with the ‘real’ in a new way. One either works with real materials representing themselves as material quality, or one works with pure space and pure colour that represent pure visual effect. A red room with inclined walls and floor is a red room with inclined walls and floor. It expresses a particular ambience, a particular feeling, a particular energy, etc but it is not a fake slaughterhouse. If a yellow beam penetrates the room diagonally the space is even more particular and expressive, but it is not a fake representation of a real space. It is an art space. It has built its own logic and its own grammar. Thereby giving the performance a formal freedom that spaces with concrete references cannot give. The formal space brings the theatre closer to an unpredictable art form.

Unfortunately it seems that the art schools do not give the students enough competence in the area of space. It demands a very analytical understanding of form, materials, colour, and architecture to communicate with space. In my experience, most students put some objects with some kind of reference value into an existing theatre space and call it scenography. The space as such is not explored, not used as artistic material. One could say we reduce the theatre to an art form that plays around with objects of reality and social and psychological references. Theatre performances become somewhat transparent, real life passes through, reality lays itself as a layer in front of the composition of the performance with its constant reminder of the fact that we are here in the black box or in studio two or the National Theatre or whatever.

**Composition in Time**

In order to think of theatre as a composition of elements in time and space, it seems necessary to think methodologically about time. A very simple way of doing this is to draw a time line, and thus almost start by deciding how long the performance is going to last and think of rehearsal time as a question of generating material. There are several ways of generating material, one can start from themes, classical texts, newspaper articles, and songbooks whatever. Creating a space that can hold and structure this material can be done before, during or after material is gathered. What is important in our way of making theatre is that the composition of elements in time and space is done as a separate operation, after the
generation of material has taken place and before the rehearsals of the performance start. So the composition of the performance takes place as a visualisation of how the performance can be ‘seen’ as a drawing of a structure that includes the elements that are to be related in time and space; actions, words, songs, dances, atmospheres, themes, etc. Part of the compositional process is to create the visual aids that can function as the notation for the composition. There is lots of help to find in modern music. This is, however, another discussion, that we will have to return to some other time. Theatre is a composition of elements in time and space. Making theatre means creating and choosing the components, relating them and performing them in time and space.

NOTES


4. There is nothing wrong with pretending. However, it is our experience that professional theatre artists develop bad habits of being blindfolded through this practice of pretending. The difference between what you actually see and what you imagine you see very easily becomes blurred. This again often causes a mixture of signs and communication strategies that easily make a performance totally unreadable for an outside eye

5. See e.g. De Deuve, Terry (2001) Kant après Duchamps, Norwegian translation Kant etter Duchamps, Pax forlag, Oslo


Preface to Neither
Jacob F. Schokking
NEITHER BY SAMUEL BECKETT

to and fro in shadow from inner to outer shadow
--
from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself by way of neither
--
as between two lit refuges whose doors once neared gently close, once away turned from gently part again
--
beckoned back and forth and turned away
--
heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam or the other
--
unheard footfalls only sound
--
till at last halt for good, absent for good from self and other
--
then no sound
--
then gently light unfading on that unheeded neither
--
unspeakable home
DS standing still & swaying as dizzy.

[15:08] Text in bend bands (luminance hey?)
That is how the libretto begins that Beckett wrote at the request of Morton Feldman, and which resulted in the opera Neither (1977). A work I saw for the first time in Amsterdam in 1991 in a stylistically perfect staging by Pierre Audi, with stage design by Jannis Kounellis.

Ever since, I have thought that it is one of the few works from the existing opera repertoire that it is necessary for me to stage.

The succinct libretto with its 87 words distributed over ten sentences, is free of dramaturgical mechanics such as plot, conflict, and character development. In Feldman’s hands it nevertheless becomes about 50 minutes of music for a large orchestra and a soprano.

One voice, which in a kind of internal monologue, pins down the interference point between neither and nor.

A neither-nor which we try, through the structuring of reality by language and rationality, to keep at bay so as not to lose our footing in a world where only change is a certainty.

In our everyday life we hold up these congealed linguistic and formal structures as an exorcising mask against the constantly shifting and disturbing facial expressions of reality.

They are form as routine: familiar, collectively adopted patterns of interpretation that spare us from being harassed by the unique intensity of every single instant.
So that the fixed-form mask does not wholly make us forget the changing facial expressions behind it, art breaks the patterns, the formal structures, down into individual components only to reassemble them in new structures. New structures without routine that require keener perception, an interpretative effort; masks, perhaps, that reveal more than they cover up.

Neither is such a restructuring; with the zealous precision that only poetry permits. The voice describes a consciousness of something that is ‘self’ and something else that is ‘un-self’, but both are equally impenetrable in their nature.

The libretto continues as a shuttling between these states, a movement that is contrasted with a final stasis: death.

The shuttling movement of the text between self and un-self is a statement that the forms exist, the states exist, but perhaps only by virtue of their interaction. In other words, a process exists.

The shadowy progression, from inner shadow to outer shadow, has its sparse lighting, later in the text even points of light.

There is also silent sound – unheard footfalls – halfway through the text, a sound that shortly afterwards stops; stasis forever.

There are no other actual events in the normal dramatic sense, only concentration and intensity.

‘The tone is sung beautifully and there will be no feeling of a parlando-like approach. She is singing, yet it is not directional. Time makes the line, the connection. Time itself becomes what is lyrical. It would be as if she is singing a tune, but it’s not there.’

Feldman in a letter to Beckett, 4th Nov. 1976

That is how Feldman described the role and effect of the singing voice in a letter to Beckett, while he was still working on the composition.

A modulation of time as both form and lyrical expression requires a modelling of the spatial conditions in the staging which is just as precise in the handling of its resources.

The most essential spatial resources are light and shadow. I have worked a lot with those in the thirteen years it has taken to arrive at a staging of Neither. In fact the constant project has been to combine modelling and modulation in one scenic idiom, through a
> S. slowly moves fwd. in diagonal back light beam
   & stretches out L. arm
>> CCUDD of S (incl. feedback, lenses ?!)
Delicious toplight on S, maybe slant (?!)

S crouched, lying down on side.

CCVDO top cam total of S, image processed with ripple effect (emitting from cts.), audio triggered through close mic on gang.
choreography of light in a stage space almost purged of stage design. Light, shadow and sometimes moving pictures, as video projection lights, in a space opened up for the acting human being.

From the composer's hand, *Neither* was conceived as an opera. Viewed in a fixed genre perspective, this work has difficulty living up to several of the usual criteria for what normally constitutes an ‘opera’. For example there are no *dramatis personae* as points of identification in a dramatic narrative that is also missing here. Through this absence of standard elements imported into opera from the drama, *Neither* opens up that quite special place where text, music and staging meet both as equals and in a unity. This is the paradoxical point where the more rigorous definition and internal consistency of the individual elements first give the combination meaning. In my view, it is also where opera as an art form hides its greatest potential.

*Neither* is just one version, among many possible ones, of sound-accompanied text for staging. On the other hand, this almost 30-year-old version ventures further into its exploration of the paradox than many of the works that have seen the light of the stage since then.

*Jacob F. Schokking*

Heegnde, 5 May 2004
Theatre, text - context:

Dramaturgy in a spatial art form

Kristian Seltun
The title of my lecture, ‘Theatre, text – context’, may seem somewhat out of place at a symposium that focuses on non-literary, physical, visually oriented theatrical art. The title comes from a series of seminars held over several years that I helped to organise at BIT Teatergarasjen in Bergen in the latter half of the nineties – a series, that is, entitled ‘Theatretextcontext’, all in one word. The seminars were about text – text written for use in the theatre, or text that the theatre chooses to use, because it works as text in the theatre – without necessarily being about traditional drama or acting. Against the background of BIT Teatergarasjen’s then 10-15-year-old programming history, it was precisely visually oriented theatrical art that was our starting point. We wanted to get away from the traditional play, but we still wanted to discuss text. For we saw that even the most visually and spatially oriented stage artists – such as Remote Control, Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Théâtre du Radeau, to mention a few that are nevertheless quite different from one another – all used text in one form or another. Visual dramaturgy enabled the use of quite different kinds of text from those traditionally written for the theatre. We saw that if any type of text could potentially be a theatre text, the theatre was a text context, a context of which text can form a part.

And so the seminar series ‘Theatretextcontext’ took the form of dramaturgical discourse.

A central figure in the Theatretextcontext milieu was the Norwegian dramatist Finn Iunker. In 1994, during a stay at Ritsaert Ten Cate and DASARTS in Amsterdam, Iunker had written The Answering Machine – A Text for a Theatre. That same year the text was directed by the American John Jesurun in a production for ten actors. Later the same year the Belgian theatre company Tg Stan produced the text as a monologue (with Frank Vercruyssen).
The text begins as follows:

And. A few examples. Or suggestions. For you. You have entered. And I. And they? Connections. Possibilities. Fare well. You see? You offer. I was mostly looking at the person beside you. That way. In the corner of my eye. I could see you. And you not me. But you could sense me. My eyes. Like animals' sense. As an offer. Strange. Parted. Clean up your mess and do something else. Beware. You might hurt. And you may leave. Anywhere? You connect your negations as possibilities if you must. Really? Sure. Sheffer stroke and then he ran. Unoffered. And then. What. They. They offer. They must have been foreigners. Strangers. They talked about peace. That’s right. About peace. They wanted peace. Because they were tired of war. That’s. What they said. And then. They just repeated it. Yes. That’s right. We want peace. Because we are tired of war. They spoke. Of nothing else. Foreigners. Strangers. But all this is of course. Only examples. (lunker 1994: 3)

And so the text continues through six densely-written pages, in a staccato, telegraphic style. When Frank Vercruyssen from Tg Stan performed it as a monologue the production was just over an hour long. This was too short, the Norwegian Association of Dramatists thought, when Finn lunker, encouraged as he was by what in this case we must call a certain international success, applied for membership. No, said the Association of Dramatists, this is not a theatre text. But it’s been produced by Tg Stan, lunker replied. Fair enough, said the Association, but the production is too short. So, asked Finn lunker, shall I ask Frank Vercruyssen to perform the text slower, and ask him to insert an interval?

The discussion was absurd, of course. The length of the performance presumably had nothing to do with the dispute, for the Norwegian Association of Dramatists operates with a tariff format (for tariff formats are what this is about!) within which the text had to fit – that is, the one-acter, which lasts one hour without a break. The problem was the style in which the text was written. The then board of the Norwegian Association of Dramatists refused to accept that this apparently non-dramaturgical text could pass as drama. And on that precise point perhaps they were right – that in terms of genre the piece cannot be placed as drama. But that it was, and had become, a theatre text they could not dispute. If their understanding of dramaturgy had been adequate, as we shall see, they might have realised just that. Instead they not only gave a good writer the brush-off; they gave the theatre itself the brush-off.
It is also part of the story that Finn Iunker has long since become a member of the Norwegian Association of Dramatists, and that he was nominated last year as a Norwegian candidate for the Nordic Dramatists’ Prize. All the same, Iunker’s drama is still hardly played on Norwegian stages, despite the fact that his recent plays show far more willingness to relate to the dramatic as a formal literary genre. I will get back later to his more recent pieces, which are more traditional in form, and show you how, despite the differences, there is still a link between his later and his early work. First let us look a little more at the ‘unperformable’, non-dramatic *The Answering Machine*.

As you have seen from the short extract, the text is written in prose, broken up by a series of full stops. Thus the style is not dramatic, with traditional dialogue. However, the frequent use of the full stop breaks up the text in a way that gives it a strongly oral feel: syntactically, the text is easy to read. In addition the frequent use of the full stop gives rise to a number of ‘exchanges’ that also make it possible to see that it is a kind of dialogue among an unknown number of voices. Irrespective of this, the main point for Iunker has been to keep the dramaturgy, understood as a compositional form, open. As the subtitle, *A Text for a Theatre*, quite clearly states, it is still a text that the author expects to be subjected to dramaturgical thinking. And I am not talking about a dramaturgical *adaptation*, in the way that novels or other prose texts are dramatised for the stage, where the text is given a new formal structure, with strong compositional imperatives for how it can or should be staged. No, the dramaturgical thinking to which a text like this wants to be subjected is of a far more open nature.

*Dramaturgy* is not a concept that refers primarily to the forms and principles of literary composition. The concept *also* refers to this, but not only to it. The concept of dramaturgy only takes on its meaning in the literary context when the literary aspect, the text, is conceived as being in an interrelationship with another medium, in our case theatrical art. To speak of dramaturgy in a novel is meaningless. As I see it, dramaturgy is therefore a concept that is first and foremost the preserve of the theatre, not of literature. It is from the viewpoint of the theatre that one can assess whether a text is suitable as a theatre text or not; not from that of literature. And – everyone sitting here knows this – the theatre can do more than simply behave dramatically!

In traditionally dramatic, literature-based theatrical dramaturgy, on the other hand, there will be a requirement for a very high degree of interdependence in the discursive relationship between the textual on the one hand and the spatial and theatrical on the other:
the dramatic text has been shaped so that it can offer itself to the theatre; the theatre considers it possible to realise it more or less in accordance with the structure exhibited by the text.

This traditional understanding of dramaturgy can be said to be based on the fact that the literary, discursive or prescribed plot and a scenic potential at the ideational level are structured in an interrelationship with each other. It is impossible to imagine that one takes priority over the other, because the scenic and the literary exist here as the enabling conditions for each other. And for that reason, on the basis of such a traditional, and in my view very narrow concept of dramaturgy, one can speak of the literary and the scenic with reference to the same compositional structures. In this perspective, for example, Bertolt Brecht’s epic dramaturgy can be accounted just as traditional as the Aristotelian model with which he wanted to make a break, purely and simply because epic dramaturgy too starts with the assumption that there is an interdependence between textual and spatial compositional structures. New developments have come to the theatre rather through crossovers in the arts that have continued and built further on the autonomisation of theatrical art that the pioneer stage directors launched during the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries. So paradigmatically, it was Artaud who broke with traditional dramaturgy a few decades later – not Brecht.

The Answering Machine, on the other hand, cannot be said to stand in an interrelationship with a scenic potential in any other way than seeking a response from a theatre that is compositionally supremely independent. If some traditionalists also experience this as a limiting imperative, so be it.

When the interrelationship between the composition of the text and the spatial response, that is the theatre which the text seeks to structure, ceases, we are in a situation where any text can be a theatre text: one can perform the telephone directory if one wants. Although this would not be of any great literary or indeed theatrical interest, the point is that there is nothing about the form of the telephone directory that dictates that it is not suitable as a text for the theatre.

Once any text has the potential to be a theatre text, we enter into a phase of theatrical history that we can now term postdramatic, after Hans-Thies Lehmann’s book Postdramatisches Theater, which appeared in 1999. However, I do not think the situation is quite as simple as the concept of the postdramatic in its direct sense suggests, and as it is often interpreted and expounded in the academic secondary literature, where concepts like logocentrism and
authenticity are still being dished out as if they were fresh morning rolls. The discussion that I have outlined for you so far, between text dramaturgy on the one hand, and a free, autonomous theatrical art practice on the other, points to a dispute that is long-standing: it has followed us throughout the whole development of the modern theatre, that is from the development of the Regietheater or directorial theatre on. It peaks with Artaud and it is institutionalised in the neo-avant-garde of the sixties and seventies, followed by a wave of visual scenic art in the eighties and nineties. And this is where we stand today: the theatre is an independent art form, characterised by its spatiality, its visuality and its audibility. It is three-dimensional; it cannot be pinned down to the page of a book. If the war between text and theatre still seems to continue – kept alive not least by the theatre's own intellectuals, the semi-educated, logocentrism-fearing writers of manifestos – it is because the greater part of the theatrical art that is offered to us, in the big buildings, is still so damnably traditional.

I believe that the logocentrism criticism is, if not a blind alley, at least a street we have now gone up and down several times. All the same, I feel that the discourse, not only in and around the area of performance art, but also around large parts of what we completely inaccurately, both in Norway and Denmark, call 'the performance theatre', is preoccupied with issues that really haven't come an iota further than Artaud did with his hieroglyphs. All credit to Artaud – as you will understand, I think he holds a particularly important place in the history I am presenting for you here – but an art of the theatre that deals with the problem of authenticity, either directly as its content or more indirectly by positing it as the central point in its legitimation, is in my view old-fashioned. Not old-fashioned in the way the theatre is old-fashioned when it reproduces classic plays in a totally predictable form – and in a universe where people, both practitioners and critics, still think theatre is literature, or at most some kind of advanced (and very expensive, one must be allowed to add) form of reading aloud, but old-fashioned in the sense that one then belongs to a fossilised avant-garde discourse where being able to reach down to the tangled truths of one or other of the otherwise dominant discourses is something any artist with self-respect imperatively imposes on his or her activities. I cannot enter the 21st century without regarding art, including theatrical art, first and foremost as a rhetorical activity, that is an activity that is situated in all senses within discourse.

But don't we all agree on this, some of you are perhaps thinking. True enough – art criticism and theory have long ago agreed on this. That is why performance art itself, such as we have inherited it from the sixties and seventies, is a form of expression we must now say...
is irrelevant. But in theatrical art the discourse of the avant-gardes lives and thrives. It was treated ironically by the French choreographer Jérôme Bel in the latter half of the nineties; but after him we have had a whole succession of Bel devotees who, at any rate without self-irony, see it as their prime task to apply post-structuralist theory to the stage. And this is particularly the case in the dance field. ‘Dance about dance’, it’s called. As opposed to ‘dance-dance’.

I read an article this summer. True, it was four years old, but I think many people will still find its arguments inspiring, not least in the content-free, but oh-so-meaning-hungry post-dance field. It was Henrik Vestergård Pedersen’s article ‘Tanker om den ligestillede dramaturgi’ (Thoughts on equal-status dramaturgy), published in the book Performance Positioner, Mellem Billedteater og Performance Kunst. Here we find statements such as ‘movement is closer to the soul than the word’ and ‘the non-verbal, just as much as the word, is the bearer of truth’ – statements which at a brisk, almost religiously Artaudian pace, set our whole dramaturgical discourse back a century in time. Which truth is the subject of the dispute here?

Let me be spared, for all the rest of my theatre career, having to listen to anyone say that something is more genuine than something else.

All the same I must cite yet another example: last autumn a book appeared in Norway that got a relatively large share of attention considering that the subject of the book is rather narrow. It is called Vår teatrale tid (Our theatrical time) and was written by the theatre connoisseur Anne-Britt Gran. The main claim of the book is that our time has become so theatrical – in everything from the way politicians behave to how we ourselves are urged to behave in the supermarket – that a quite special ‘hunger for reality’ has grown up in the population. This explains the popularity of ‘reality TV’. In this authenticity-seeking climate the traditional, theatrical theatre, according to the writer, has had its day, while performance art, ‘the strongest and most explicit expression of the hunger for reality in our time’, has now appeared on the scene again with renewed relevance. This is then supposed to be in stark contrast to the traditional, realistic theatre where ‘the body as body is paradoxically absent. It is only the body in the role that we see, where it is an instrument for embodying the fiction’ (Gran 2004: 122).

Although my enthusiasm for traditional, realistic theatre is limited, it is tempting to remark that any theatrical performance at all will always, quite fundamentally, have the real-time aspect. It is therefore, as far as I can see, a highly debatable claim that in the traditional,
realistic theatre is only ‘the body in the role we see’. There are people who cringe in pain as the curtain goes up, even at a quite traditional realistic performance, simply because the theatre as such becomes an all-too-real social situation for them. Anne-Britt Gran goes further, and introduces into the discussion of this ‘hunger for meaning’ the concept of an ‘aesthetic of death’ with direct reference to Artaud’s thinking. As applied to the entertainment industry, I believe there is some truth in this ‘aesthetic of death’ because in the cases in question it is presumably only the law that prevents us having reality concepts where people are killed for real, as Gran also fears may happen. With the discussion of the theatre, however, the situation is different. Artaud’s writing on the theatre is, of course, a relevant reference for the reality aesthetic, but for what expressive strategies? In dealing with Artaud’s poetics, one must always remember that in parallel with the hunt for authenticity there is also a clear expectation of a high degree of stylisation, precisely as a precondition for bringing authenticity into play; in other words, a theatricality that is explicit, visible, and manufactured in accordance with all the modes of stage art.

Whether it is an actress in a Baroque costume who is standing on the stage, or a performance artist with his head in a bucket of blood, both are equally genuine. The dissimilarity lies in the fact that different aesthetic strategies are in play. Which of these is best suited to satisfy the ‘hunger for reality’ is on the other hand as much a question of context as of aesthetics.

Moreover there are far more expressive strategies with which to contrast the performance aesthetic than the traditional, purely realistic literary theatre alone. What is most at stake in this discussion is therefore not ‘truth’, but the issue of theatrical diversity. And as long as the majority of our theatres look as they do today, we will be stuck with this discussion for a long time to come. Very many theatre managers, actors, dramaturgists, directors, critics, teachers, as well as academics in the arts subjects – as if performing arts studies did not exist – and last but not least, very many members of audiences, see theatre first and foremost as literature, or as an extension of literature. This is a challenge for those of us who want a more diverse aesthetic orientation in the theatre. And then we are required to meet the challenge with something more than rhetorical devices that are mired deep in a modernist metaphysics of presence.

I will round off my polemic against the logocentrism critics here. However, permit me, if anyone should have entertained suspicions of anything else, to emphasise that I fully recognise the roles that both the avant-garde as such and the critique of logocentrism have
played, and that I recognize the role that both still play. Even though much of the discourse of the avant-garde is played out, this does not mean that we do not take a great deal with us as critical experience. In our dramaturgical discourse, we take a number of forms and expressive strategies.

The most important aspect of the postdramatic in the theatre is that theatre thus appears as an art form in its own right. As regards the theatre text, the situation is then that when the theatre gains its full autonomy, so does the text. This may be manifested in a so-called ‘equal-status dramaturgy’ (Arntzen 1991), where all the scenic resources, including the text, are on an equal footing in the meaning-hierarchy, and any kind of text may be a theatre text. But this may also mean that the dramatic text can be reintroduced in the theatre, purely and simply because equal-status dramaturgy permits this too.

To give you an example of this, we must turn to Belgium and the Netherlands. Most of you will probably know that this is where we find some of the world’s foremost examples of a typical postdramatic theatre, represented by artists and companies such as Jan Fabre’s Troubleyn and Jan Lauwer’s Needcompany, to mention only the most famous – these particular examples being from Belgium. It is slightly less well known that the Flemish and Dutch-speaking theatre also has a quite distinctive text-theatre tradition which lies very far aesthetically from the postdramatic, visual directorial theatre, but which still has strong links with its dramaturgical basis.

I am talking about actors’ collectives such as De Roovers and De Onderneming, in addition to the already-mentioned Tg Stan – which is presumably the best known internationally – from Belgium, while in the Netherlands we have the companies Dood Paard and t’Barre Land. These are all companies that were established at the beginning of or in the course of the nineties. However, the aesthetic origin, the father figure for this large family of companies and actors, is a person who was established as a creator of theatre in Holland as early as the sixties: Jan Joris Lamers, known as prime mover, actor and dramaturge in the company Onafhankelijk Toneel, later in Maatschappij Discordia. Today some of you will perhaps know him as a stage and lighting designer for Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Rosas.

In order to give a description of the style I am talking about, I must use a concept which may not be quite watertight, but which can still serve as a kind of illustration, the concept of *mise-en-lecture*. This conceptual construct is of Canadian origin – I myself have it from the milieu around Jacob Wren and the company PME – and I do not think it has ever been used in a Flemish or Dutch context; all the same permit me to use it in this context. We
can see it as a kind of devised reading; thus we go from *mise-en-scène* – staging, to *mise-en-lecture* – a devised reading. A typical feature of the companies in question, and in particular of Maatschappij Discordia and Tg Stan, is that in the production period the actors will spend most of their time around a table. They work without a director and only exceptionally with a stage designer, but often with a rigorous, minimalistic lighting design and a few selected props. In the production period they all function, actors and lighting designer/technician, as a dramaturgical group. If the piece is a classic, and it often is, it is read with great thoroughness, jointly. If it is a classic from another language, for example Ibsen or Chekhov, new and old translations, Dutch, French and English, are compared. They decide which translation they think offers the most relevant interpretation, or they get help in developing a new one. The main thing is that decisions are made after the whole company, in thorough discussions and readings, has acquired in-depth familiarity with the text. The reading process is as long as a normal rehearsal period – but without the actors abandoning the desk work. When this part of the work has been completed, the text is learned and the roles are distributed. After this comes a short period, often no more than a few days, sometimes not even that, with trials on the floor, before they go straight to the premiere. The result is a surprisingly fresh, text-based actors’ theatre. When the audience comes into the hall, the actors are always on a stage with subdued lighting just like the auditorium. The actors are as ‘private’ as it is possible to be. They smoke, drink mineral water and watch the audience finding their places. Then when the acting begins without further spectacle, a little of the light is often kept on in the auditorium, leaving no doubt that the audience and actors are in the same space, in the same situation. The acting style is understated, and with a basis in the thorough text study, the company has made it is motivated to the greatest possible extent by subtextual interpretation. At this level, one can say that the acting style is psychologically-realistically motivated. But in the gestural, the physical, it is stylised to the absolute minimum; it is almost a kind of underacting. The actors move a little, they engage in a dialogue among themselves, with the relevant temperament, but all the same not like ‘characters’: they appear rather as actors who know the drift of their own and the others’ lines very well. As mentioned, there is not much in the way of stage design, other than a simple, highly emphatic lighting design, combined with a few carefully selected props and objects that rarely have any other function than looking good, or which one quite practically can sit on. Although it is simple, it is aesthetically very beautiful. The costumes are almost always completely contemporary, mostly from Belgian and Japanese fashion designers. Neither the stage space nor the costumes are there to establish an illusion meant to support the text, but function rather – or at most – as a framing symbolism.
They are there first and foremost to establish a space for theatre; the stage is quite simply marked as a place where theatre can happen. And as we have seen, it is a space that includes the audience. So as a spectator, one can experience not only being a witness to but also being part of, a kind of active evaluation of the text that is being played. The theatrical space is manifested as a social space where people jointly form a view of and study a discourse, for example a text by Henrik Ibsen.

If we want to place these Belgian and Dutch actors’ companies in the history of the theatre, naturally we must first note that there is a very high degree of Brechtianism in this aesthetic. Jan Joris Lamers and the actors who have followed in his footsteps, and in particular the ablest of them, are, as far as I can see, Brecht’s dream actors – they are quite simply the actors that Brecht, towards the end of his life, in his (actually conciliatory) remarks on Stanislavsky’s method, wrote that he had always wanted. If we then go further and for the sake of simplicity, agree to say that Grotowski was the one who combined Stanislavsky’s psychological focus with Brecht’s expressionism, we could as the next step say that Jan Joris Lamers carries this fusion further, with the addition that artistic crossover developments, with happenings and performance art in the sixties and seventies, lie in between. The characteristic feature, then, is a subdued, everyday acting style with a special openness towards the theatre as a social situation: no attempt is made to conceal the fact that the actors on the stage and the audience in the hall are in one and the same space. The actors are almost to be regarded as private persons: the role does not lie first and foremost in their appearance, but in the text. What distinguishes this from the Brechtian style is the conceptual understanding of theatricality that has entered the picture through the performance art aesthetic: it is not an epic model, understood as a dramaturgical plan, that forms the basis of the acting, for the text may be anything at all – even a self-enclosed, totally logocentric piece of bourgeois realism.

Fundamentally, I think that here too we have a case of equal-status dramaturgy. It is a post-dramatic approach to the material, but by a theatre that trusts so much in its own independence that grappling with the classic, dramatic, self-enclosed texts is not seen as a problem; it is rather viewed as a place for the theatre to start. It is a theatre which, in terms of its placing in the tradition, has absorbed deconstruction, but does not dwell on it as an issue.

These Belgian and Dutch groups are quite unique, not only because of the uniqueness of their style, but also because the quality of the work they do is particularly high. However, their awareness of the theatre as a social arena fits in with the larger picture of developments in contemporary theatrical art since the beginning of the nineties, where an ambient
Theatre trend has been a central concept, and where, more recently, a social-political action theatre has seen a renascence; in the past year we have seen this clearly in Matthias Lilienthal’s programming at HAU in Berlin. The tendency has been discussed in more detail in art theory, as a relational aesthetic (by Nicolas Bourriad).

If the relational aesthetic is experienced as something new in visual art, in the case of the theatre it is more a matter of a renascence in phases. Ever since the so-called retheatricalisation at the beginning of the last century, the modern theatre has been preoccupied with seeing stage and hall as linked in a social space. With Georg Fuchs at the forefront, but also with the better-known Max Reinhardt in the ranks, the aim was to break down the boundary between stage and auditorium, between theatre and life. This could be done in the theatre, by building a projecting stage which burst through the closed framework of the proscenium, as Reinhardt had the stage built in his stadium-like Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin. With room for 3300 spectators, and a stage that extended in curving stairs far into the hall, it was the theatre as a social mass meeting that was the ideal. The advocates of retheatricalisation looked at the European popular theatre, the kind that was played in booths where people were gathered anyway – on the market square – and which as a social phenomenon engaged in a dialogue with the masses. The modern festival idea, manifested through Richard Strauss’, Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s and Max Reinhardt’s initiative for the Salzburg Festival, was a direct consequence of this thinking: let the town be filled with art, let art surround life on all sides, let art become everyday life. In a modernist perspective, which mixes avantgarde with popular culture, this way of looking at the festival, as a historical axis, can be said to culminate 49 years later with the Woodstock Festival in 1969.

If we put the transcendent ambitions of the avant-garde aside, and instead introduce a perspective that sees art as relational rather than countercultural, the techno raves of the eighties and nineties come to mind as a kind of futuristic realisation of total theatre, while the ambient club scene re-established the theatre as a social meeting-place and discourse-generator. The interactive, or relational, action theatre in which the German Rimini Protocol engages, where each member of the audience, for example, as in the production Call-Cutta, is given a mobile phone, and is then sent out into the streets of Berlin, with instructions to move according to the directions of an actor who is in fact speaking from a call-centre in Calcutta, draws on both the agit-prop theatre of the twenties and the self-service happenings of the sixties, as organised by Allan Kaprow.
It is clear that this revitalisation of the theatre as social praxis draws heavily on the avant-garde tradition and all that this involves of expressive forms and dramaturgical strategies. And I think, as I have already emphasised, that the theatre will continue to take much from this aesthetic heritage. But at the same time I believe that we are facing a shift in focus, where the questioning of form will take a back seat while a greater interest in a message-oriented content will emerge. This is in keeping with the trend towards re-politicising the theatre that has long been in evidence.

Like Georg Fuchs and Max Reinhardt, we will continue to ask ourselves questions about what is so special about the theatre. The cliché that the theatre is the art of the moment, the living art form that changes from evening to evening, will accompany us whether we want it to or not. We are forced to reformulate our attitude to this cliché. Instead of expending our energy penetrating down to a presence-metaphysical ‘truth’ we must stress the theatre as an authentic arena in itself.

The theatre is local. It cannot be distributed electronically or digitally. You have to be there, you have to take the time to seek out and interact socially with what is being expressed, whether it involves sitting in front of a proscenium or hanging around on a club evening with performative elements. The theatre, to pay lip service to Anne-Britt Gran, does not satisfy the hunger for reality of our time so much by breaking down its own traditions as by manifesting its own diverse distinctiveness alone. Today the theatre finds its relevance because it is exclusive. Not in the sense that it excludes, but in the sense that it is unique. The theatre is elitist, yes, but as Grotowski has pointed out, there are all sorts of elites; every evening a new performance and a new audience; every evening a new elite. The theatre offers itself as a space for experience, which the socially-involved human being visits to acquire a socially rooted frame of reference.

In this perspective, many people will probably agree with me that the big, tradition-burdened theatres will emerge badly, because the reproduction of the conventional takes place at the expense of the exclusive and the feeling of having a relevant experience. But at the same time we cannot dismiss them, and for my own part I must admit that I like the big old layer cakes of some of these illusion machines better and better provided they have an interesting trip to take me on. Unfortunately, it is rare that they do, but you understand my point: I like the buildings because I like the purpose for which they were built.

Looking at theatre as a situation in itself will be more important than drafting poetics for the kind of theatre aesthetic that suits our time. And in this theatre – that is, the theatre that
exists in the experimental, often self-imposed avant-garde peripheral zone, it is fully possible to reintroduce both the textual theatre and the ultra-theatrical visual theatre. It is no longer a matter, as in the performance-art tradition, to investigate and subvert expression; it is about using expression. One must have something on one’s mind, and one must be able to make engaging, good theatrical art out of it.

I like the idea that the theatre is an ‘incident’: you have to have been there, exactly there, when it happened, to have taken it with you. If our time suffers from a hunger for reality, this should be attractive enough.

To illustrate the meaning of the theatre as incident we can look at the situation surrounding Chinese underground theatre. Theatre of the contemporary, socially critical sort is, of course, forbidden in China. All the same it happens, en masse, at squats in old shops, in closed-down factories, or quite simply in people’s apartments. Because of the fear of being arrested, these performances are rehearsed and produced in a very short time and are then often played only once, for a very limited audience, perhaps only ten or twenty people. However, what happens afterwards is that a filmed version of this one unique performance is spread on videocassettes in a network consisting of several thousand hands. These people never get to see the performance as theatre, but the urge to spread documentation of what we can call ‘the incident’ testifies to the power of the living theatre.

In the theatre born of the avant-gardes, there is a great deal of fine theatrical art – indeed for my own part I would say that this is where the best and most interesting theatrical art is to be found. But in this tradition there is also a fear of the theatre, and I think this fear is quite unjustified, or at least it is anachronistic. I am thinking, as you will have realised, of a kind of new retheatricalisation of the theatre. What I hope to see in the future is more theatre, less deconstruction. Challenging allegories in a three-dimensionally composed art are what I want to see; whether this is based mostly on the word or mostly on movement, I don’t care, but it must be intelligent and brilliant.

Since our modern concept of dramaturgy originally comes from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, from the title of his critical collection *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767-1769), we must also consider the fact that dramaturgy is first and foremost about what we want to do with our theatre, then about how it is to be composed and how it should look. The authenticity lies in the fact that those who are on the stage and those who are in the auditorium watching are in the same space. The question of the relationship between them is a question of dramaturgical art. The only dramaturgical blunder one can make today, as I see it, is to try to
hide the fact that what is happening on the stage is theatre, whether by performing with a watertight fourth wall, as in naturalism (an impossible ideal – it becomes bad theatre if one tries anyway) or by deluding oneself that what is happening on the stage is more real than what happens in any other theatre, as in performance art. The theatre is real. It pants, it sweats, it asserts, and it argues. I like that.

To conclude, I will return to Finn Iunker’s drama. I want to show you some short extracts from two of his recent plays – Play Alter Native from 1999 and Iphigeneia from 2003 – because I think the will to retheatricalise is present in both of these.

**FIRST, PLAY ALTER NATIVE:**

1
In a kingdom, the people were all drinking from the same river. This was their only water source. And it got polluted by idiots Higher up the river.

**IDIOT (A):**
What’s that?

**IDIOT (B):**
Chemical waste.

**IDIOT (A):**
Waste it.

2
**CHORUS:**
Three important things to avoid.
One. Thirst and hunger.
Two. Cold.
Three. Hostility.
Keep these three things out of the way,
And you are on the right way.
And they dressed in warm clothes.
And they drank from the river.
And they shook hands, like friends.
(And they had already had lunch.)
And the water made them mad.

3
ONE (A):
We are all equal.

ONE (B):
And we have warm clothes on.

ONE (C):
But up there...

And he pointed to the castle, up on the hill.

ONE (C):
Up there lives the king.

ONE (D):
Well? He is the king. Where should he live?

One clapped his hands,
Because the argument had been to the point.
One started to think about
Something completely different.

ONE (E):
The king is not like us.

And they clapped their hands,
Because he had been to the point.

ONE (F):
Since we are all equal,
And since the king is not like us,
Then the king is different,
And mad as hell,
And not equal,
And it stinks.

And they clapped their hands.
One started to cry,
Because he had been thinking about
Something completely different,
Because he had been thinking freely,
Like a madman.

**ONE (D):**
I am against the monarchy.

**ONE (B):**
Yes.

**ONE (A):**
Let’s go and get rid of him.

**CHORUS:**
Yes.
And they clapped their hands,
Because they had a plan.
And they shook hands, like friends.
(Iunker 2000: 39)

**AND THEN **_Iphigenia_**:

O
At Aulis, the Greek generals are prevented from leaving for Troy because there isn’t any wind. However, they have heard that the mighty Artemis might grant them wind if Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter, the innocent
Iphigeneia, and Agamemnon thought it best to send for her. We follow this exciting story from dawn till noon. The end seems somewhat ambiguous, even to us. Be that as it may, there aren’t any other ambiguities to worry about.

1
**DAWN. AGAMEMNON IS WRITING**

2
**MORNING. AGAMEMNON, ALEXANDER**

**AGAMEMNON** I might have made a mistake. *(Pause.)* When I placed the order to have Iphigeneia sent here in order to get us safely off to Troy in order to get Helen safely back in order to fulfil gods know what promise, I placed great emphasis on the hypothesis that murdering your own daughter is ‘wrong’, of course I did, but I never fully understood how her head, that we now are risking, in many ways resembles my own, and it aches. *(Pause.)* Last night I even dreamt that Iphigeneia came to see me, and that she placed her hand on my forehead, as if to make it shut up. *(Pause.)* And then, suddenly awake, I realized that my own despair meant very little. Looking at my hands I realized that I cannot use what I love to obtain something I simply do not comprehend. Troy. Asia. Helen. *(Pause.)* You really don’t approve of this marriage, do you.

**ALEXANDER** What marriage?

**AGAMEMNON** Look. Idea, very simple: We tell Iphigeneia to come here. Why. Because she is going to be “married” to Achilles. Then we kill her instead. Okay? That was the idea. But it was wrong. New idea, also very simple: We tell Iphigeneia not to come. That’s why, my dear friend, I have written a second letter to Clytemnestra. *(Produces letter, which is folded.)* Very short, know it by heart. In fact, it could have been written by a Spartan. ‘Don’t send us Iphigeneia. We have to postpone the wedding.’ *(lunker 2003: 9)*
Both plays, unlike *The Answering Machine*, have a relatively traditional dramatic form. Does this mean that Iunker has abandoned postdramatic dramaturgy and gone straight? No. I have said that when the theatre finds its autonomy, the literature or theatre text finds its too. Finn Iunker makes full use of this and writes a kind of drama that is not only highly stylised and to some extent expressionistic; it is the perfection of the drama as a literary genre that is so enclosed in its own form that it hardly seems to point to a possible stage realisation. One might well say that the plays are parodies of dramatic convention, but at the same time they have literary qualities too good for this to be the final, unequivocal judgement. As I see it, they are conventional drama addressed to a postdramatic theatre.

That is why these texts are not performed in Norway. Everyone likes them – everyone, including the directors of the large institutional theatres. But no one knows what to do with them; the texts are very good, but how does one make good theatre from them without it becoming dull? It is, of course, fully possible, but one has to break with a good many conventions first. The traditional theatre, which can do the textual work, can get no theatre-aesthetic handle on this material, while the experimental theatre, which presumptively represents a greater diversity of aesthetic strategies, is so ignorant of traditional textual work that it does not understand anything when confronted with these plays. They think Finn Iunker has sold his soul to the Devil. But – as you have perhaps already guessed? – Iunker’s dramas are performed in Belgium. By actors’ companies. Right now he is writing a new play for De Roovers. So unplayable it isn’t.

I am not sure whether the concept of the postdramatic is a good concept. It has not been possible for me to go far enough into the issues in this article. What I will say nevertheless, and quite briefly, is that I think the concept is too general, and therefore also too imprecise. In addition, as developed by Hans-Thies Lehmann, it is still lumbered with a good deal of avant-gardist discourse that I think we have done with. The main thing is that, irrespective of where we feel we are in the history of the theatre, the text stands stronger than ever as an element in theatrical art. That is to say, the theatre’s greatest challenge is still a relationship to text. This is not least a challenge for the experimental theatre, which has a good tradition of skipping too lightly over the textual. Formal experiments are, and will always be, quite essential, but they do not have the same meaning in themselves as they have had throughout modernism and postmodernism. We are searching much more for content now. The theatre can best meet this head on by focusing on its own distinctiveness; the time for questioning this is over – we have questioned long enough. This doesn’t mean that I am an advocate of the traditional. All the same we must accept that the theatre is a bit old-
fashioned in its form: it is local and cannot be distributed electronically. Our challenge is to actualise this.

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Making Change: the composing body in devised theatre

Bruce Barton
Attempting to define ‘dramaturgy’ remains a popular pastime among North American theatre communities. But the range of possible responses is practically as broad as the number of its practitioners is great. Mercifully, most contemporary discussion on this topic has moved beyond attempts to categorically fix dramaturgy’s ‘correct’ objectives and techniques into a consideration of its effective variety and potential. Yet most understandings of dramaturgy as a practice include two basic characteristics:

1) an effort to establish and maintain a degree of critical objectivity; and 2) a deep commitment to the creator(s) involved, the project, and the potential of live performance. Further, while highly elastic in terms of specific strategies, a central role of dramaturgy is to question habit, to foster reflection, and to dig beneath the surface of unearned presumption.

These ‘simple’ precepts are, of course, considerably more complex on the ground. And the situation becomes even more complicated when authorship is fragmented and dispersed among a collaborative body of creator/performers in the act of creating a performance text. Unlike the more traditional hierarchy of text-based work, the relationship between the multiple means of expression in physically-based work is charged with anxiety and ambivalence. Inherently abstract physical gesture wrestles with the relative concreteness of spoken language. Within the context of this increased ambiguity, it is not surprising that the face and function of dramaturgy is an elusive target.
Admittedly, ‘physical’ and ‘devised’ theatre are broad categories that include a wide range of very different objectives, techniques, and styles. Indeed, ‘physical theatre’ and ‘devised theatre’ are neither synonymous nor mutually inclusive. Attempting to arrive at the intersection of these forms only complicates the situation.

Most practitioners propose very few defining characteristics for devised theatre beyond a fully collaborative method of creation and the absence of a fixed, pre-existing baseline of common knowledge (such as a playscript). Others utilise a series of related frames, and these can include an extended and open-ended approach to the creative process; an unconventional allocation of resources that often prioritises research and development over production; an immediate and integrated relationship to the space(s) in which the work is developed and performed; the exploration of advanced technologies as both practical innovation and thematic focus; and a pronounced integration of inter-artistic, inter-disciplinary, and intermedial practice and practitioners.¹

Similarly, ‘physical theatre’ resists strict classification, but much of its practice shares common features, which include the following:

• an emphasis is on the actor-as-creator rather than the actor-as-interpreter;
• a working process that is collaborative;
• a working practice that is somatic and located in the body;
• a stage-spectator relationship that is open;
• an emphasis on the ‘live-ness’ of the theatre medium.²

Whereas the idea of devised theatre is generally considered to have emerged in the late twentieth-century, the ‘first wave’ of physical theatre is traceable to the early twentieth-century rediscovery of commedia dell’arte by Craig, Meyerhold, and Copeau.

The ‘second wave’ of physical theatre is attributed to likes of Joan Littlewood, Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, and Eugenio Barba. Physical theatre also demonstrates the influence of drama from Buchner and the extreme Expressionists, the Epic Theatre of Brecht, and the Absurd writings of Beckett and Ionesco, through to the deconstructionist works of Peter Handke. Virtually all accounts offer Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty as pivotal in physical theatre’s defining rejection of the central authority of text, and the dismissal of naturalism as a valid representation of human experience. Intriguingly, what is common to virtually all discussions of devised and physical theatre is the idea that they are theatres in and of ‘space.’ Space is key to their creative processes. pace is key in their performance. Space is key to their reception. And in the centre of all these spaces is the performing body.
As such, a dramaturgy of physically-based devised theatre can be seen as a dramaturgy of the composing body in space.

For the purpose of this presentation, the terms ‘physical’ and ‘devised’ come together in an approach to theatrical performance for which text is only one of numerous intersecting means of expression. Text is, indeed, often of secondary importance. Rather, imagery and narrative emerge primarily out of movement, improvisation, physical discipline, and a set of creative tools regularly referred to as \textit{instinct} and \textit{intuition}. Physically-based devised theatre is, in a sense, an \textit{opportunist} form of theatrical creation, in which precisely trained performers rely to an uncommon degree on coincidence. It is a form of theatre that requires its practitioners to be highly sensitive to the unpredicted, and to be able to seize and capitalize on the unexpected.

What does it mean, however, to say that the performer-as-creator experiences her process as instinctual and intuitive? Well, one immediate implication is that the field, or plane, of creative activity – and thus of dramaturgical inquiry – is not ‘naturally’ either explicit or fully discernible. Rather it is immersed \textit{within} the composing body. Complicating matters somewhat is the relatively common practice among physical and devised theatre practitioners to use the terms instinct and intuition interchangeably. And so, at the risk of taking an overly ‘academic’ detour, I’d like to explore these concepts for a moment.

According to the Penguin English Dictionary, \textit{Instinct} is understood as a condition inherited through membership in a species at a particular stage of evolution. It is also related to the priority of staying alive: fight, flee, or lie down and play dead. \textit{Intuition}, in contrast, is a process of gaining and using knowledge that operates outside of evident thought or stimulus. An ‘insight,’ intuition appears as what is sometimes called an ‘explanatory gap’ – what Franco Ruffini refers to as a ‘jump’ – which cannot be explained or predicted based on the available evidence. Thus, physically-based devised theatre may evoke and exploit the \textit{instinctive} responses of both its practitioners and its audiences. However, the high level of physical and intellectual rigour and the extensive training involved make use of \textit{intuitive} knowledge and skills to a far greater degree.

A sound first step, then, is to try to demystify the concept of \textit{intuition}, somewhat. A strong parallel can be found in certain positions in contemporary cognitive psychology, which propose the workings of ‘implicit’ consciousness. Within this model, an individual’s conscious thoughts, feelings, and actions are directly influenced by the undetected, ‘implicit’ memory of only apparently forgotten past experience, as well as by the present but undetected
stimulus accessed by ‘implicit’ perception. We have memories that we can’t consciously remember, and we perceive things that we don’t consciously perceive. Similarly, an individual experiences implicit learning, basically generating knowledge one doesn’t know one knows. Such a model of consciousness proposes a level of rich undetected experience that influences conscious thought, emotion, and action – one that potentially explains the ‘explanatory gap’ of intuition. The gap is only apparent, as the thoughts and perceptions that lead us to ‘jumps’ are experienced implicitly. And while we can apply strategies to scrutinize and pry open implicit processes, by definition they can only ever be partially known or controlled.

While cognitive theories of implicit consciousness involve physical as well as mental activity, a phenomenological approach proposes related processes that are located squarely in the body. Phenomenology proposes a ‘bodily awareness’ in which all other knowledge is rooted. This ‘corporeal intellect,’ if you will, like implicit consciousness, shapes conscious thought in deep but often undetectable ways. From this perspective, the most fundamental type of memory – that which is a precondition for all other memory – is ‘body memory.’ Body memory is only possible when the body experiences and ‘understands’ a perception or movement – an experience that precedes conscious understanding. By extension, through the development of ‘bodily sensitivity’ to a particular subject matter through repetition or training, we develop ‘bodily knowledge.’ This bodily knowledge can not only provide proven, effective responses to familiar situations, but can also adapt to new and/or evolving circumstances.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of this understanding of intuition, for my purposes, is the assertion that the body is ‘spatial matter’ – that we are not merely ‘in’ space, but actually made ‘of’ space. Within this context, spatial relations and movement through space are understood as the most immediate and potentially complex source of ‘bodily knowledge.’ They are also our most powerful means of communication. Indeed, from this perspective the lived body is, itself, an act of communication. However, as the philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty observed, we are ‘always on the same side of the body’ – that is, within it – so that our perspective on our own bodies is always partial and always unique. As a result, the lived body – the body in space – is something we can never fully know or control. My body is powerfully manipulated by external yet often undetected cultural influences. My body is inevitably shaped by the perceptions of others that I can neither accurately anticipate nor share. My body is, in fact, always something of a mystery to me.
It is in the context of these ideas that I would like, for the remainder of my talk, to introduce you to one of the physically-based devising companies that I work most closely with in Canada. Number Eleven Theatre of Toronto represents, if you will, a ‘third wave’ in physical theatre philosophy and practice. By means of this introduction, I hope to share with you my evolving thoughts on a dramaturgy of the intuitive, composing body in space – both as an understanding of creative processes and as a set of engaged, developmental strategies.

I have worked with the members of Number Eleven Theatre – and, specifically, their director, Ker Wells – in a variety of dramaturgical roles since I first encountered the company in 1998. In that time their activities have had a huge influence on my understanding of physically-based devised theatre practice. Certainly, the most immediate influence on Wells and the company has been Wells’s mentor Richard Fowler. It was with Fowler that Wells founded Canada’s earliest, landmark physical theatre company, Primus, which disbanded in the mid-1990s. Yet an understanding of this lineage must include the influence of the Odin Theatre, where Fowler had studied extensively, and of Eugenio Barba, with whom Fowler maintained an ongoing professional and training relationship. Further, while Wells is uneasy about identifying increasingly distant influences, Grotowski is also a conscious presence in Number Eleven’s practice.

[...]

Drawing on methods acquired while in Primus and further developed through ongoing application, the individual performing members of Number Eleven begin the development of a project in isolation. Each conducts his or her own research and creates initial scenes or, more accurately, patterns of movement and voice. These, in a sense, represent the first, tentative explorations of the space of the future performance. These may be inspired by any combination of personal reflection and memory, works of visual art and music, and found or created text (drama, fiction, poetry, and songs). Invariably non-naturalistic, the patterns are also elastic in terms of the relationship between text and gesture. The troupe may begin with an agreed upon initial inspiration for a full-length work, but it is regularly multifaceted. It may involve elements as general as ‘the Holocaust,’ as specific as select short stories by established or obscure authors, and as abstract and evocative as folks songs from a particular ethnic group. In this way, they consciously establish a partially shared and determined thematic context. This will inevitably lead to a higher degree of ‘readability’ of physical gesture. At the same time, however, they intentionally resist thematic closure, in order to make it difficult to establish a stable interpretation of physical movement.
Then the company begins the long collaborative process of establishing connections and conversations among the individual sequences. At this stage, this resonance is primarily physical in nature (for instance, in terms of spatial dimensions, direction, size, tempo, rhythm, etc.). After carefully observing the performers individually, Wells begins to orchestrate two or more of the sequences simultaneously. Progressively, he encourages greater and greater degrees of intrusion and interaction. Each of the individually created spaces of the performers is thus immediately compromised, complicated, and enriched by the interference and “contamination” of another body – of another space. Asking for repositionings and alterations of scale, velocity, etc., the director initiates a process of sculpting in both space and time, seeking out the most evocative, striking, and engaging exchanges in the physical ‘conversations.’ Such sculpting is seldom an end in and of itself, however. The most significant points of resonance are those that the director interprets as thematic. His early responses therefore assume a lasting significance, as he attempts to identify the initial sites of relational meaning in the still unborn narrative structure. And herein lies one of the main paradoxes of the company’s approach to composition. On the one hand, Wells’s separation from the individual, physical acts of creation – his ability to see the ‘other sides’ of the performer’s bodies – allows him to assume central authority over their manipulation in space. At the same time, however, his authorship is almost entirely dependent on the material generated by the performers – they are the space in which and from which the work is sculpted. As such, the ‘ground’ upon which meaning may be based is perpetually in flux. Thus, even in its earliest phases, the process draws upon two successive stages of composition that bring together ‘fragments’ of initially distinct textual and physical material.

Contrary to traditional expectation and practice, the resistance between these recontextualized fragments remains a conspicuous characteristic of both the formal and narrative structures of the eventual performance. As such, it offers a record of the company’s process. It also offers a reflection of the similarly composite quality of perceptual experience. The initial text fragments may be transposed, modified, substituted, or deleted through the progress of this work. The emerging meaning of the piece is developed through a physical dialogue between the performers, the director, and the shared space they are constructing and through which they move. This strategy effectively undermines any absolute or fixed distinction in, or relationship between, the performance’s means of expression. Such practice, in the sheer volume of its messages, also foregrounds the overwhelming richness of perception that the body naturally experiences, and thereby resists the intellect’s premature desire to sort input, to select priorities, to discard excess, and to fix meaning.
Understandably, the experience is as intimidating as it is liberating for the performers. The company must be able to withstand prolonged periods of uncertainty and abstraction. But the objective is not a self-consciously postmodern ‘pastiche.’ Barba is an evocative filter through which to consider Number Eleven’s process:

Confusion [Barba suggests], when it is sought after and practiced as an end in itself, is the art of deception. This does not necessarily mean that it is a negative state, one to be avoided. When used as a means, confusion constitutes one of the components of an organic creative process. It is the moment in which material, prospects, contiguous stories, and diverse intentions become confused, i.e., fuse together, mixing with one another, each becoming the other face of the other.

This final image provides a potential route into the complex issue of composition in physically-based work. However, I find the metaphor of ‘mixing’ or ‘fusing’ of elements, ‘each becoming the face of the other,’ inadequate, in that it suggests a modernist anticipation of eventual organic unity. Rather, in the work of Number Eleven, it is precisely the ‘turbulence’ – the disruptions and interruptions – between the multiple physical and textual vocabularies that shape the work’s narrative.

Instead I propose a metaphor that is, on the one hand, more rowdy and unstable, and on the other, more visceral and substantive. That metaphor is ‘collision.’ Collision is the fundamental act and condition identified by Sergei Eisenstein in the creation of montage. Montage, Eisenstein asserted, is conflict – it is ‘the collision of two given factors [from which] arises a concept.’ While the ‘factors’ are material, the ‘concept’ is psychological and emotional. In particular, Eisenstein insists that montage is not a linear process. Rather, for Eisenstein, montage is explicitly characterized ‘[b]y conflict. By collision.’

The model proposed by Eisenstein accurately describes the physical strategies used by Number Eleven Theatre – although in a manner that is far less contained and predictable than Eisenstein anticipated. The company’s ongoing process of creating initially disconnected and unrelated sections of movement and text that are then, in a very real sense, brought into collision, parallels Eisenstein’s pursuit of psychological and emotional concepts. Eisenstein’s understanding of montage avoids explicit, intellectual, and verbal approaches to interpretation. Instead it communicates through manipulations of image, movement, and spatial relations that rely upon intuitive and perceptual experience. Montage, literally embodied within physically-based devised theatre, attempts to bypass efforts to identify
logical interpretations. Rather, it approaches its spectator through intuitive and instinctual levels of communication.

Within this initial understanding of dramaturgy in terms of the basic strategies and structural characteristics of Number Eleven’s work, I would now like to shift to the idea of dramaturgy as a set of developmental practices, and to describe to you the nature of my engagement with the company’s approach to creation. In this way, I believe, many of the more conceptual ideas I have proposed may become considerably more concrete.

In 2002, while working on the company’s creation entitled The Prague Visitor, Wells and I addressed the question of a specific and defined dramaturgical role most explicitly. After approximately six weeks of creative work, a staging of The Prague Visitor was offered as a public workshop at the Festival of New Theatre, hosted by the North American Cultural Laboratory (NaCl) at Highland Lake in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. I was also participating in the Festival’s ‘Internal Exchange,” an intense week of physical theatre workshops, discussions, and performances. This proved a significant context for our work, as I attended three consecutive rehearsal runs, as well as the public staging.

The Prague Visitor tells an elusive and fragmentary tale of a young man (apparently from North America) who travels to Prague to take up a position at the ‘Central Registry.’ The city unfolds and folds back in again, repeatedly, through a series of interactions and exchanges with a wide variety of other characters. Some are momentary and others deeply embedded in the production’s maze-like weaving of history, fiction, and fantasy.

[...]

After a break of several months, Number Eleven returned to The Prague Visitor in January 2003. Reopening the ‘package’ that they had initially constructed the previous summer, they consciously challenged the patterns and interpretations which, Wells conceded, had emerged with unsettling ease during that first period of development. Indeed, this ease suggested to us both a use of intuition that had more to do with pre-existing solutions than innovative explorations. This time, meaning was to be challenged at each step in an effort to ensure that the performance’s spatial and thematic dimensions were fully earned in the moment, rather than through a resort to habitual ‘shortcuts.’ It was into this intentionally destabilized environment that I was once again invited as dramaturge. I attended weekly run-throughs for the nearly three-month period of the company’s exploration, with each viewing followed by an extended one-on-one discussion with Wells.
It is useful at this point to turn to a comparison offered by Wells. As dramaturge, he suggested, my observation of weekly run-throughs was in a sense analogous to viewing video recordings of him ‘wrestling with a crocodile.’ It is fine, he noted, for a dramaturge to watch closely and suggest that ‘You probably shouldn’t have put your arm in his mouth like that.’ This would certainly be useful (if somewhat obvious) advice if the next day the director was to do combat with the same crocodile in precisely the same way. But, as discussed, Number Eleven’s process is shaped by a far greater engagement with unpredictability. What would be considerably more useful, Wells continued, would be to have someone standing immediately beside him to advise, ‘Okay, now, don’t put your arm in the crocodile’s mouth’; or, more immediately effective, ‘Look out, here comes the crocodile’; or, perhaps, of even greater utility, ‘Wait, it’s not a crocodile at all, it’s an ostrich!’

In this playful analogy, I have come to realize, Wells has provided important clues in the search for a dramaturgy of the composing body. Ultimately, effective dramaturgy of this type of physically-based work must likewise prove that its worth is, like the creative act itself, earned in the moment. ‘For a process that takes such a long time,’ Wells notes, ‘things happen fast.’ Within this context, the potential for deep dramaturgical insight may only be realized through a surrender of the safety of physical and imaginative distance. It may only be earned by means of a relocation to within the spatial and conceptual site of collision. An effective dramaturgical presence in this type of work, then, can be seen as one that is located within the perceptual space of the company’s prereflexive dialogues. It is one which literally embodies the principle of collective objectivity. At odds with the traditional understanding of dramaturgy as critically distanced reflection, dramaturgy within the intuitive space of physically-based devised theatre may also need to occur in the brief, fleeting moment when it is necessary to distinguish between a crocodile and an ostrich. Pregnant with potential, these pivotal instances are also likely not to be repeated or recreated.

Having developed the level of mutual trust and respect that Wells suggests is a prerequisite for this type of creation, the next stage was to begin exploring what such a dramaturgical relationship looks like. In January 2004, the troupe remounted The Prague Visitor. In the months leading up to the production, I returned to my role as dramaturge, but my job description had expanded considerably. Rather than only attending specially scheduled weekly run-throughs of the show, I was also present on a more frequent basis to observe the far more characteristic and fragmentary process of their work. I was also relocated, physically and imaginatively, into much tighter proximity to the director. This also moved
me into the turbulent sites of the project’s material collisions. My role became more fluid and multifaceted. In literal terms, my position on the rehearsal hall floor, beside Wells, provided us with a shared visual sense of the evolving work. It also offered us a relatively common experience of its spatial dimensions. This location also allowed for easy and immediate exchange, with a minimum of interruption or distraction for the performers. I was also free to move throughout the rehearsal space – where I could see the ‘other side’ of the ‘other side’ of the performers. This allowed me to move in and out and around the sculpture in process, to construct a composite perspective, which could then be shared with Wells as the rehearsal continued. Wells’s method of operation proceeds within a perpetual stream of questions that often seem intended primarily as intuitive triggers. Some are directed to specific actors, but many are posed generally to the company: ‘how about. . . ?’; ‘what if. . . ?’; ‘can you. . . ?’. And with a surprising absence of disturbance, I was invited into the creative dialogue in what was, for me, an unprecedented level of immediacy.

Thematic considerations such as character, language, and structure blended with spatial issues of design, gesture, and choreography. Wells and I would discuss choices related to topics such as blocking, timing, and the appropriate dimensions of text (length, pitch, tempo, accessibility). For example: the atmosphere of *The Prague Visitor*, given its premise and theme, is one of increasing enclosure and entrapment. Wells and I discussed multiple ways of creating this effect, including a section of the work in which the performers literally bind the playing space through the use of retractable strapping. Similarly, we discussed the progressive creation and collapse of space through character placement, in order to emphasize the unpredictable and increasingly constrained access to movement on the part of the central character. A key piece of setting in *The Prague Visitor* is a mobile door, set in a simple frame, which is constantly relocated about the playing space. In direct response to the performers’ evolving relationship with this property, Wells and I discussed its critical symbolic qualities, its defining relationship to the production’s spatial registers, and its dominant influence on the piece’s narrative.

Throughout this activity I was constantly reminded of the deeply self-critical and reflective nature of Wells’s approach, and that of all the members of the company. My presence did not seem to introduce an otherwise absent function into their process, but rather seemed to focus an element of self-examination at work within each stage of that process. The collaborative nature of their work relies on a degree of curiosity and questioning that continually encourages reflection on their own and one another’s contributions. But this curiosity is at all times informed by a dense intuitive or prereflective field of communication that is
perceived rather than interpreted. It is also communicated in the complex, diffuse languages of the body. Somehow, the practice of dramaturgy within this context must claim space within this field, yet must also be able to move outside, to become the ‘other’ of the performance’s collaborative body. This provides at least a partial explanation of why my immediate presence did not result in disruption for the performers, whose relationship with Wells during development is deceptively intense (given the degree of laughter and joking that goes on on the floor). Certainly, it had never before accommodated this kind of outside participation. However, the fact that they are moving so quickly – imaginatively as well as physically – requires that the dramaturge get in close, hang on tight, and be prepared to dance.

To conclude: a dramaturgy of the composing body in devised theatre must attempt to incorporate the central significance of intuition as both a precondition and a key process of creation. Within the collaborative exchanges of devised theatre – which is a slow process in which ‘things happen fast’ – development is often experienced unpredictably and in ‘jumps.’ In these ‘explanatory gaps,’ theatrical situations that have been explored repeatedly, over extended periods of time, may unexpectedly yield radical and illuminating solutions, as practitioners who have developed deep trust and familiarity with one another’s lived bodies engage in intuitive ‘pre-reflective’ dialogues. Bypassing both the time delay of intellectual exchange and the restricting logic of verbal expression, the performers – who have waited patiently for the appropriate moment of inspiration – suddenly recognize, scrutinize, and reflect back one another’s rich physical abstraction. Put simply, in these moments they ‘Make Change.’ However, the central role of intuition also invites the opportunity for practitioners to rely upon habitual strategies and recycled frames of reference. In these moments, past learning and implicit knowledge are accessed in a form of intellectual and bodily ‘short cuts.’ Proven, pre-fabricated solutions to familiar problems – one of the basic responsibilities of individual intuition and bodily knowledge – may emerge without conscious recognition on the part of performers who find themselves short on time, energy, imagination – or all of the above. In a context where intuition has been granted uncommon authority, it can be difficult to differentiate between revelation and resignation.

In such a framework dramaturgy in practice is posed with the seemingly impossible task of sharing the prereflective space and intuitive field of the composition while at the same time establishing a separate, reflective dialogue with the performance’s collective body. For the dramaturge must foster and facilitate the intuitive ‘jumps’ of innovation while revealing and challenging the intuitive ‘short cuts’ of habitual response.
The space of physically-devised theatre is dense, complex, and charged with rapid, sudden motion that is often only immediately visible in the turbulence it creates. In this space of the composing body of devised theatre, a significant aspect of effective dramaturgy is the art of knowing when – and when not – to get out of the way.

[...].

NOTES

1. For the most detailed discussion of one, systematic understanding of devised theatre, see Alison Oddey's *Devising Theatre: A practical and theoretical handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994)

2. These characteristics are drawn from Dympha Callery's useful guide to physical theatre, *Through the Body* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001)

3. In *Creativity, Cognition, and Knowledge: An Interaction* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002), edited by Terry Dartnall, Richard McDonough defines creativity as *emergent materialism*, characterised by an 'explanatory gap', in which the creative properties of the generated knowledge cannot be directly attributed to the base properties of the mechanisms involved in the generation of that knowledge


5. For an accessible, applied discussion of phenomenology within the context of physical performance, see Jaana Parviainen's *Bodies Moving and Moved: A Phenomenological Analysis of the Dancing Subject and the Cognitive and Ethical Values of Dance Art* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 1998).


Dance Dramaturgy: possible work relations and tools

Pil Hansen
At the heart of the experiences I intend to share with you lie strategies and tools for probing the productivity of difference. A relevant question is: what can be gained from filtering approaches, ideas, and material through (some)body with different sensibilities, different perceptual specialisation, and/or different training? The question is relevant for the development of the dramaturge's tools, for the development of the choreographer's approaches, and for the generation and composition of art works.

Here we are in the field of dramaturgy, particularly dramaturgy in relation to creative processes of choreographers. When I was invited to give this lecture I was asked to raise the question, ‘Is there a specific dance dramaturgy, a dramaturgy inherent in dance?’ My answer to this question is no; there is not one, but many, and while it is possible to discuss tendencies of repetition, such tendencies do fortunately undergo change all the time. Dramaturgy is a complex and fabulously messy field, and while Hollywood has success with repetition of one dramaturgical model, the politics of a unifying recipe for composition is not something I am willing to introduce to the field of dance. With a deep respect for change and chance I find it much more productive to speak about dramaturgical tools, strategies, and work-relations as measures that are continually being developed within the field.

I shall soon enter into my own experiences as a dramaturge and scholar, particularly through the example of my work on the performance *Frontiers* by the Venezuelan-Danish choreographer Sara Gebran. But first I suggest we take a look at examples of how dramaturges work with contemporary choreographers (a situation we primarily see in Germany and Belgium, but which is spreading to other locations). For those among us who do have knowledge about theatre and film dramaturgy, I believe these examples will transport us out
of the text-based conventions that shape material according to fixed principles of narrative, causality, character, coherent fictional universe, and interpretation of meaning. However, what we do approach is not only an engagement with the presence of the body. We approach an integrated space of complex generation and composition.

**DANCE DRAMATURGES**

In a conversation that took place in Amsterdam in 1999 and was documented by Scott deLahunta¹, Heidi Gilpin, André Lepecki, and Hildegard De Vuyst offer introductions to their work experiences with, respectively, the choreographers William Forsythe, Meg Stuart, and Alain Platel. Heidi Gilpin explains that she translates ideas – linguistic, mathematical, or scientific – into an understanding that offers a common ground for her and Forsythe, a ground that facilitates interaction between their mutual obsessions. André Lepecki says that he is present throughout the entire rehearsal process and offers feedback to Meg Stuart outside the studio. He calls his first contributions ‘metaphorical explosions’, which is a way of expressing what he sees, the connections, in terms of sight as well as physically-based experience. At a later stage of the process he helps Stuart work the material towards a coherent performance. Hildegard De Vuyst regards herself as the first spectator and works with Platel on constellations of small solo pieces. Sara Gebran took a workshop with De Vuyst in Århus in 2002 and experienced that De Vuyst was deeply committed to strengthening and developing moments of material – material that performs physical acts of communication, such as a relation between two bodies or in the shape of responses (action-reaction series). Her questions often addressed the motivation and cause of physical actions, rather than abstractions, and she was capable of translating this investment into a dramaturgy of process, offering the choreographers restrictions or specific tasks that help them avoid the repetition of habit and work towards different solutions.

The spectrum of these examples ranges from abstract theory, through connections and composition, to an investment in physically-based actions. To these examples I’d like to add the approach of a dramaturge working within a different geography: Brian Quirt, dramaturge and Artistic Director of Nightswimming in Toronto, Canada. The history of Quirt’s collaboration with the choreographer Julia Sasso involves development of her dance work as well as filtering text through her sensitivities in order to develop written plays. In an interview Brian gave me in 2003 he explained that his attention is not so much on the movements as it is on the moment when two dancers stop moving and turn their faces towards each other: that is, physically-based dramatic expressions of human relations. He did also mention that
he aims to uncover the initial impulse that inspired the work, and challenge gaps between what the artist wishes to communicate and what is communicated.

These examples merely offer an impression of the range that exists. I shall not elaborate further on the differences here, but will move directly into more general observations. A precondition for this kind of dramaturgical engagement is a work relation of great mutual trust—trust in terms of mutual respect for the other’s approach, but also in terms of creating open channels of dialogue and integration. For the choreographer this means inviting the dramaturge into her process and engaging in the various levels of reflection the dramaturge can facilitate. For the dramaturge it means considering the choreographer as part of her material, choosing the right tools, and allowing the material to affect and change the tools. For both it means a clear agreement about confidentiality, agency, and ownership. My stand on the last issue is that I am a facilitator; the choreographer makes the choices and she therefore carries the responsibility and ownership of choices as well as material. A condition for giving this talk about my work with Sara Geban, and for adapting it to this article, is that my use of her material has been approved by her.

On a material level, some of the mentioned dramaturgs can offer collaborators something quite different from dramaturgical input. Some of them have achieved very high recognition, which is useful for fundraising purposes; some have access to ‘corridor talk,’ which effects funding even more; some work in international networks, which is useful for international tour and connections to possible collaborators; and all of them bring a level of reflection and vocabulary to the artwork. The latter can strengthen the artists’ ability to communicate and brand the specificity of their approaches, and it may help them trace the historicity of their work into the avant-garde and various art movements.

**Optical Filter**

On the level of the dramaturgical input the dramaturge has different training and different experience than the choreographer from which to observe, comment, and give advice. The dramaturge also often has access to perspectives from other disciplines, practical or academic, depending on her background and training. All of this participates in the optical filter of the dramaturge.

I shall shortly leap into my scholarly field: mechanics of human memory and perception. By optical filter I mean the physical as well as linguistic, auditory, and visual memory we perceive and communicate through. What we see and experience is shaped by our memory
and by how we are socially and professionally conditioned. The direction of our attention, the singular inputs we select, and how we combine them in perception is strongly dependent on previous experience. Our conditioning stems from learning and from copying, and adapting to, the reactions of our surroundings. Thus we are moulded by our surroundings and we mould our surroundings in terms of both physical and mental intelligence. While the repetition of experience is our fastest and strongest answer to any situation, a dialogue across optical filters will inevitably lead to mutual contamination and transformation, to change and chance, and to new experiences. This is one out of several paths to the development of our perceptual skills².

The studies I have made into neurobiology and cognitive psychology take part in my filter, so do my studies into, and experiences with, theatre and film dramaturgy, and so do years of learning how to analyse performance material and communicate my analyses with words. Thus my perceptual and communicative skills leap to vision, words, and meaning before most levels of physicality.

**DIALOGUE AND RESEARCH**

Now to my work with Sara Gebran, and the example of the solo performance *Frontiers*, which premiered in Copenhagen in the spring of 2004³. Sara’s process of creation has four steps. The first is a dialogue about ideas and concepts; the second is research and generation of material in the studio; the third is to narrow the channels of dialogue and generation and read the material, make decisions, cut or strengthen connections, and secure levels of consistency; the fourth step is to reflect on the process and learn from it. Using the privilege of retrospection, I interchange the order of the third and fourth steps in my presentation.

In my work with Sara, the productivity of the dialogue across our optical differences became clear right away. Sara came to me with descriptions of specific movements and physical acts. I perceived them as meaningful concepts – semantic concepts – and offered them back to her as such. She picked up my concepts and offered new sets of movements and physical acts that could more clearly reflect her understanding of what I aimed to communicate. I was perceiving and communicating through my analytical training, constantly looking for structural or meaning-based ways of organising and reflecting her input. Sara was primarily perceiving and communicating from her motory memory and from her training-specific understanding of movement. Because of the fact that she, like De Huyn, is interested in the physical act, her understanding of movement and the body was rapidly translated into situations of acting out relations between body and space, body and objects, body and gaze.
Over a number of hours, conversations, and emails, this dialogue went back and forth between semantic concepts and physical acts, both of which were reflected up against, and generated through, numerable external sources of inspiration. The initial impulse leading to the work was the war against Iraq, but the dialogue and Sara’s ideas moved into numerous other areas, including immigration experiences, how we define space and act out group mentality, as well as religious, economical and political interests at play. Sara was reading the philosopher Noam Chomsky’s *Manufacturing Consent* 4 which discusses the relation between consumer culture, media, the multinational arms industry, and governmental warfare. She was also looking into films dealing with war zone border spaces. She was interested in political graffiti, in children’s games that claim street space, poetry dealing with the topic of accusation, styles of Arab folk dance, and much more.

**DRAMATURGICAL STRATEGY**

In response to the dialogue, I handed Sara a copy of the Argentinean-Canadian Guillermo Verdecchia’s scripts *Fronteras Americanas* and *The Noam Chomsky Lectures* 5. Along with the scripts, I offered her a piece of advice from the 1950s avant-garde artist Kandinsky 6 and a dramaturgical strategy from Verdecchia’s work. In my words the advice was: when taking inspiration from another discipline, do not copy artistic practices, but learn the principles of the other discipline and apply your own means through them. The dramaturgical strategy was 1) earn the possibility to address issues by offering your audience multiple entries to the work; 2) to address the issues through inversion and irony, reflect the constellation of your audience in relation to your performance material; and 3) earn the right to do so through self-implication and self-reflection: point towards yourself and point towards yourself pointing. Basically this means do not copy, but do adapt; discover principles/concepts and filter them through your own artistic means. Furthermore, balance every didactic act of pointing with an act of pointing towards your own agency, and make sure that you invite your audience to install themselves in the work in multiple ways. It may sound simple, but in practice is it quite difficult.

**CONCEPTUAL FILTRATION**

Sara went to Venezuela to work on and with her material in isolation. On her return she explained the processes she had been through and invited me into the studio to see the material she had generated. Her first reaction to the texts was that they were interesting, but that she could not imagine how to translate them into dance. Then she took the concept of
the frontier from *Fronteras Americanas* (she filtered more concepts from both texts, but I shall use this one as an example). The text’s perspective on the concept is one of a young man’s identity crisis. It deals with the frontier between two conflicting cultural identities, neither of which is real, and it deals with issues of belonging. To Sara this is a male perspective. Positioned as the female ‘other’ in gender politics, her first experience of displacement came with birth, with her entry into society, with learning how to speak, how to move, how to act, and how to define the space of yours and mine. Following this succession of thought, the frontier becomes the act of fighting up against and defining territory, and when it takes material shape as an object of conflict and war, as a wall, as a signifier of national territory, the woman can cross the frontier by allowing her body to become material as well. She can cross the frontier as a sexual object of the male gaze. In his text Verdecchia writes: ‘Some things cross the border easier than others.’ Sara responds, ‘In history the body of the prostitute is an object of transition.’ Sara’s perspective evolves from gender dynamics, through an exploration of the dynamics of territorialism, and, as I shall demonstrate later, she ends up including referents to diverse cultural tags. These are not used to bring into play the question of cultural identity, but rather to discuss how we all participate in territorialism when we sign into such group celebrations.

**CorpoREAL Filtration**

Thus far the frontier has been recontextualised. Sara has used her own experiences, her sources of inspiration, and our dialogue to adapt a concept from the text to her purpose. What remains is the challenge of filtering the recontextualised concept through her artistic means and her motory memory.

Sara’s motory memory has been developed through practice of particular organising systems. For many years she has choreographed and taught modern dance from principles of release technique and contact improvisation. She is inspired by artists such as Trisha Brown, David Zambrano, and Stephen Petronio. As mentioned, her interest is with the communicative potential of dance, with movement as a language. From Gebran’s perspective the body is perceived as functional, responding to the pull of gravity in and out of balance, the direction of momentum, the moment of inertia between phrases or sequences, the limitations of the joints, and the 360 degrees of falling in spirals. All of this informs her corporeal response to material.

Her work method is to generate movement from improvisation, using objects, scores, and concepts to break her habit of movement and focus her options. In this case she uses a role
of wide sticky tape and a piece of chalk. The task of the improvisation is to translate the linguistic concept of the frontier into conceptual scores of the relation between her own body and something external pushing, pulling, or defining her body. She has to translate speech acts into physical acts, communicating through conceptual scores. Gebran has allowed me to share a glimpse of the result with you. (For the purpose of this publication a series of photos has been extracted from the 3 minute performance video that was projected during the talk).

ANALYSIS

With several references to the graphical shape of the Christian cross, the score is the division of the stage into the small space of ‘yours’ and the large space of ‘mine.’ But it becomes more complex. As the centre of the score, the frontier becomes a line of gravitation for the body engaged in drawing it, the body balancing on it, and the body falling in the attempt to move away from it. In terms of movement, the gravitation is pulling Sara’s pelvis, but her engagement with it is also creating and reinforcing the frontier. In balance and close to the frontier, her movements are aggressive and active; out of balance and at a comparable distance from the frontier, her movements are vulnerable and reactive.

Another characteristic of the movements on the video is sexuality and sensuality (with a touch of humour). This serves the purpose of objectifying the body and commenting on the female as an object of transition. At the same time it offers the audience yet another entry to the work. Sara invites the audience to go along through the seduction of flirtation. However, the moment of lustful entertainment, fixing our gaze on Sara’s pelvis, turns into an analogue to traces of dead bodies and the act of creating a frontier between yours and mine. The lyrics of the rhythmically seductive music state ‘I put a spell on you,’ and she does, and we as the audience do. A smooth transition between two different versions of the music indicates the transition between the objectification and the act of creating the frontier. Thus, within the segment the transitions are iterative, which means that they repeat certain qualities and movements while changing others. The repetition creates the connections while the changes transform the expressions. The beginning and the ending of this iteration are marked by the sign of the cross made just before rolling out the frontier and the position of the cross Sara places herself in at the end of the last sequence. The scarf Sara has tied around her hair, as a reference to Islam, places a contrast within the frame.

In terms of audience responses in performance, the transition within the section moved the audience from laughter to seriousness. For some this meant confusion, for others curiosity and strengthened attention, and for yet others anger. This has to do with the fact that the
first and ambivalent contract with the audience, established through flirtation, is broken. To break a contract with critique is always wonderfully dangerous. Now, Sara breaks contracts in many and often much more violent ways throughout the performance.

Take the section I call the hopscotch. Sara draws a hopscotch diagram comprised of religious symbols (the David star, the cross, the moon, and the Ying and Yang) around the Danish alphabet, containing one exception: the Spanish letter ñ. Again Sara flirts with her audience with her pelvis close to the ground, this time while commenting on her physical actions in Danish, Spanish, and Arab. She states ‘this is my home’ and ‘not everybody is welcome here.’ Then she exits the frontier of her ‘home’ and crawls towards the audience. She asks them to stand up while she judges whether they look Arab enough (like her) to be invited into her home. She engages the audience in a game: they have to shout out loud the letters when she jumps on them. But the fun rhythm of the game is broken when she repeatedly jumps on ñ, a letter the audience cannot pronounce. Later she continues the game, this time creating words with her jumps: a local football team, a local bear, PLO, SS, SOS, UN, USA, UK, DK, DK, DK.

Also, consider this image. The last section of the piece begins with a belly dance – again an objectified and culturally coded body. Her movements are on beat and rhythmically fixing the audience’s gaze on her hips. She dresses in a belt of Danish beer cans with Red Cross signs on them. With swinging hips and chest she moves in between the audience members, collecting money while proclaiming ‘Yes we do accept VISA and large bills,’ and ‘Thank you for your generosity.’ Meanwhile, a large poster from the Second World War appears on the back stage wall. The poster reflects two crossed flags, the US and the Red Cross, and below the text proclaims ‘Loyalty to one means loyalty to both’.

**DRAMATURGICAL PROBLEM**

In all three examples the contract of participation is broken, and at the points of breach, whether they are gradual or sudden, the participation of the audience members is associated with actions, themes and institutions that they may not like to be connected with. At the time of the performance very few of us can escape our recognition or our implication, but we do not enjoy being tricked or pointed at. We do not like to have the contract broken.

On stage Sara is herself doing that which she criticises: she is drawing the frontier, she is abusing her audience for being different, she is using her body to collect money – but this level of self-implication was not recalled in either the positive or aggressively negative responses she received.
The examples bring to our attention the following dramaturgical questions: Is the purpose and the communication clear enough? Do we achieve the desired effect? How can we continue to invite the audience to go along, how can we make sure that we don’t push them away when we break the contract? Do we want to make sure of that, or is failure necessary to cross boundaries? If the answer is that we want to break the contract, but not lose the audience, I believe a solution could be to reduce the audience’s ambivalence about their initial entry to the work, focus the levels at which Sara communicates, and make the self-implication explicit: ‘Point towards yourself pointing.’ This is in order to fully invite the audience back into the performance after each breach.

The dramaturgical changes do not necessarily have to be done in the first section I have shared with you. There may be other sections of the performance, that are connected to this section through repetition of certain movements, acts and qualities, that are better suited for bringing into effect the dramaturgical strategy. Sara and I worked on such a solution. While we did manage to secure a level of self-implication, I don’t think we succeeded in foregrounding it, in making it clear and pushing it into the experience of the audience. The ambivalent entries were doubled rather than reduced, and while the levels of communication were reduced, they remained very complex.

Since the premiere we have discussed this problem at length, and Sara has successfully tried out using a teaching experience in the performance *Waging the Tale* to create a non-ambivalent entry. When Sara teaches university students the release technique they start walking. Gradually Sara exaggerates the walk into movements, and then she develops the movements into a sequence. As long as she offers them a comfortable and recognizable entry to the task she can have them dancing at the end of the class. If she starts with sequences, many students get blocked and refuse to engage, or simply become unable to connect their understanding of the task with their motory memory. In performance this is translated into a strategy of starting with a recognisable style of ‘pure dance’ and gradually shifting the contract into more conceptual physical and spoken actions.

**TOOLS**

The analysis and discussion of the performance examples serve as examples of the kind of understanding I build my dramaturgical reflections on. Sara’s filtration of the text material is an example of how the process of our dialogue continues into her solitary work. The discussion of the problems points us towards the fact that development not only takes place in one performance process, but takes place across several performances.
Another important result of the dialogue is the insights we earned into each other’s optics and approaches. I learned that she perceives in physical concepts and movements, and I learned how her own experiences and situation in the world serve as points of gravitation for her choices. She learned that I perceive in semantic and structural concepts, and that I am just as often wrong as I am right. In other words, she learned that reading her own response to my suggestion is much more useful than reading my suggestion.

What, beyond the dialogue, are my understanding and suggestions building on? What did I do in the studio with multiple pieces of quite raw material in front of me? How did I try to help Sara strengthen her choices and organise the fragmented material around her choices?

Our time together in the studio was very limited due to my work at the university and Sara’s upcoming premiere date. Thus I needed to work in a focused and direct way. I needed to map out the material, reflect the material and the connections, and do it in such a way that I wasn’t limited by my tendency to skip much of the material and go directly for interpretation of meaning. This was a stage where the channels for dialogue across difference, which lead to generation, needed to be narrowed. We had to use what we had already learned about each other’s approaches and apply it to this one focused task. It is about drawing a line. There was still dialogue, but it was less poetic, less open, much more controlled and targeted on mutual application of tools and understandings.

Whenever we look at something and try to map it out, we also make selections and shape the material through principles of organisation. The important challenge when working in the dance studio is to choose principles of organisation that can lead to productive selections and not just repeat habit. I decided to work with categories taken from my studies of human perception and memory – categories that may bridge into the levels of perception we can invite our audience to participate at. Subcategories were then chosen from my growing knowledge about Sara’s training and process of re-contextualisation, as well as more conventional theatre dramaturgical tools.

It is relevant to keep in mind that this separation into categories is a way of forcing my attention towards details, qualities, and situations as well as the level of structure and meaning. In perception and memory the categories are not fully separated, but take part in a complex process of neural selection, weaving, and synthesis. It is the process through which the brain contributes to the construction of selective and coherent perceptions. Thus, for example, a perception of a quality will always be informed by experience at all the levels. However, by channelling my attention towards the sensory detail I am able to work with
material that I would otherwise lose in the selective process of reaching a meaningful understanding. In the studio I directed my attention to components that might remain implicit and non-accessible if I only worked from my habit.

First I chose to look for sensory details: the tiny units of input the human being can hold through the sensory registers before they are processed into situations or sequences. These were singular movements and their qualities: inertia, direction, sensuality, sexuality, aggressiveness, vulnerability. I observed the part of the body that is activated, graphical shapes, objects, letters, singular words, singular sounds, etc. My observations were grasping at points of significance, not yet in terms of meaning, rather in terms of repetition, contrast, opening or closing of phrases, and other means of foregrounding material.

The second level was phrases and physical actions, a level that bridges from short term memory into what is called episodic long term memory, and which concerns our ability to abstract and remember situations. I looked at relations between body and objects, body and space, actions and reactions. What is she pushing and what pushes her? Where is she placing limitation and when is something else limiting her? When is she in balance and when is she out of balance? How does that reflect the relation between her movement and the lyrics of the music? What is she doing?

The third level I observed was the level of structure and meaning, a level corresponding to that which we abstract and remember in the semantic long term memory. Do her actions translate into scores and/or concepts? What does she express? How does she employ rhythm? Does her use of space and direction of movement reflect the frontier consistently? Where are the changes? Which pieces of material build blocks, which pieces are closed, which are open-ended, which develop gradually into something else? Does she alter between intensity and stillness in a detectable structure? Does the progression of the piece follow a certain structure or logic?

Throughout these observations and reflections I constantly engaged in comparison. The most important aspect to look for, the goal of my observations, was to find the possible traces across the levels and across the progression of the piece. These are traces that transport my attention from categorical separation of material to possible perceptual manoeuvres of selecting and weaving the material. The traces can be repetitions, likenesses, or references. As what I may call points of montage, the traces primarily connect material. I needed to find these traces in order to learn how they affected the material they connected. Once we had such knowledge, we could decide whether the effect was indeed what we wished to
achieve. The answer to such a question could enable Sara to make necessary changes: to lose material that was not connected, or integrate it further; to lose connections that were unwanted and build connections where they were missing; to change connections in order to change their effect.

I also looked for principles of organization within each section in relation to the material it contained, and in relation to the other sections it connected with. Let’s take the hopscotch as an example. Sara was so very focused on the task of creating words with the letters that the section became primarily organised around the structure and rhythm of the game. My questions concerned how to connect the drawing of the hopscotch with the creation of the frontier. Sara used flirtation; thus I suggested working with her pelvis as a point of gravitation as in the earlier piece. We called the hopscotch her home, and worked on how the physical borders of the home could be established with movements. When does she exit freely? When is she pushed out with violence?

Another important issue to consider was the relation between the material and various social discourses: our audience’s collective expectations, knowledge of the world, belief systems, etc. In other words, what were the connections between the material and external factors? It may seem like a fruitless task because each spectator brings different experiences and beliefs to the theatre. But in terms of preparing the performance for tour in France, Spain, and Syria this work proved extremely important. Use of language, symbols, political references, acts of war, and much more had to be changed in order to address the issue of complicity in a recognisable way. Yet, for the Syrian audience the most provoking breach of contract was not the levels of accusation (although the theatre did censor them). The part of the performance that led people to leave in protest was a masturbation scene and the belly dance.

If we had more time we would have drawn the sections and smaller bits of material onto a large piece of paper; filled in the connections and the effects; maybe even worked with photos and video. We would have done all of this in order to create a map, a tool for asking questions and making decisions. Within the limits of our studio time I made my own notes, spoke from them, and asked questions from them. Sara responded and worked her answers into the material on the floor. Only after the premiere, when the piece had to be reworked for tour, did we sit down to draw structures and strengthen decisions aided by a map. We both believe that the result was a stronger performance.
PUSH AND PULL

As you have read, my tools are influenced by my collaborator. Thus, for example, if I had the chance to work with Forsythe I would probably allow my subcategories to become informed by his geometrical system of composition. When I worked with Ari Rosenzweig on the performance Ætyde I looked for graphical shapes, patterns of relation between three people, and mathematics – because these were his main means of creating connections and effects. To sum up, a characteristic of all of the observations I have shared with you is a deep investment in what I call push and pull. This may also be called performativity. Every point of connection between two bits of material, between performance and audience, between Sara and me, has an effect, changes something on either side of the connection. This insight can be used strategically; as a means of allowing the material to become layered, to respond, to collide; as a way of allowing the audience to install themselves in the material, create their own connections and see their responses leading to a changed performance; and as the aim of a productive dialogue across difference.

To me this translates into dramaturgical strategies, that of self-implication being only one possibility. It also makes me look for the effect of the connections and look for the primary principle of the performance in the characteristics of the effects, rather than just a theme or a narration. In Frontiers the effects were violating; they were breaching contracts. Seen in relation to the connections, which were centred around acts of creating and participating in frontiers, the effects made a lot of sense to me in terms of dealing with the violence of frontiers at multiple levels.

For Sara the push and pull translates into a strategy of keeping herself and the work open to dialogue with artists and with spectators. She asks her spectators to install themselves and work for the connections they experience, and she never stops changing her material in response. Her works are always sketches in continued development, never full canvases. If you are interested in process her performances are rich; however, many reviewers and members of funding bodies in Denmark look for finished and coherent work, and thus Sara is vulnerable to the push and pull of corridor talk and discourses of established artistic excellence.

If Sara and I had wanted to work for cohesion, we could have focussed on the connections and the transitions between sections, rather than the effects. A method of creating cohesion could have been to generate more material in the transitions, and only generate from clear connections. This new and coherently focused material would then have to become fore-
grounded and would change the initial material. The result would have been a performance with unbroken flow. Flow is less demanding for an audience, but it does not provoke the effects and reactions that Frontiers did.

**PROCESS REFLECTION**

Through each production and work relation we learn something. Thinking about our mistakes and limitations is important for further development. Sara and I need to draw the line and start mapping and asking questions much earlier. We need to dramaturge her process strategically in order to secure a more thorough third stage. In terms of taking inspiration from different disciplines Sara does master the task of extracting, filtering, and transforming principles from texts, movies, etc. Next comes her wish to develop tools not only to work principles, but also to work singular formal details within the sources of inspiration. I, on the other hand, make use of what I learn through Sara in my scholarly experiments with theatre dramaturgy. I wish to continue exploring the relation between memory, perception, and dramaturgy. Thus every step of our process and collaboration leads to new developments for both of us.

I have not offered you a dance dramaturgical model; I have offered you reflected experiences including tools and strategies. I hope this can serve as a source of inspiration, and I hope it is clear that the dramaturgical approach has to become influenced by the choreographer’s approach and material. When working with dance I believe that the most productive approach is to embrace the creative challenge of adaptation, process, and complexity.
NOTES


2. For references see note number 8 below

3. *Frontiers*, choreographed and performed by Sara Gebran, music: DJ Ñ, video: Michael Bing, dramaturgical input: Pil Hansen, Kaleidoskop, Copenhagen 2004


7. *Wagging the Tale*, choreographed by Sara Gebran for the graduating students of The Danish National School for Contemporary Dance, music: Martin Vognsen, costumes: Sara Sachs, Dansescenen, Copenhagen 2005


9. *Ætyde*, choreographed by Ari Rosenzweig, Dancers: Ari and Hagit Rosenzweig and Fernanda Echenique, winner of Dansolution, Dansescenen, Copenhagen 2002

10. A possible source of inspiration for such an aim can be found in ‘Text as Landscape’ by Heiner Goebbels, in *Performance Research* 2(1), Routledge, Great Britain 1997

11. The tools I use whilst working with Sara are informed by the preliminary results of my current PhD project ‘Dramaturgy and Perception’. However, the exchange is mutual in the sense that the experience of working with Sara has changed the tools, and thus pointed me towards new possibilities and questions, which I aim to channel back into my research
The subject demystified
Thomas Wiesner
THE SUBJECT DEMYSTIFIED

The delicate disjointing of performativity and theatricality via the nature of the gaze, in the middle of Amalienborg Palace Square.

THE EXTERNAL

Participation in a symposium workshop often requires a certain kind of mild, extroverted madness; a voluntary, momentary exile on an open common, a leap into uncertain waters which, for a brief while, may feel like the motion of agitated waves in a circumscribed cup of freshly-poured mixtum compositum, in which various unresolved issues forage constantly and ferociously.

On the other hand, it can also turn out to be an exquisite pleasure – peaceable, playfully easy, refreshing; and since everything appeared to exhibit the regularity of comprehensible classification, my voluntary embedding in Space & Composition’s Workshop 4, with the overall title Performance, Performativity and the Gaze seemed a straightforward approach.

In the programme, W4 promised ‘to deal with issues of theatricality, performativity and the body, in both theory and practice’. Three theoretical texts were to be scrutinised, and the participants ‘were urged to draw up their own performance material, structured by themes derived from the texts’. The gaze in particular would be given a prominent place.

For a performance at the end of the workshop.

Straightforward.
And so it was.

Gently but firmly supervised by Dr. Gerald Siegmund, the twelve of us who had been selected were quickly seated in a cosy circular formation, and started to plumb the depths of the three theoretical texts chosen. However, it turned out that the last text handed out gave most of the participants a good deal of trouble: a small epic dated 1949, by Jacques Lacan, in German. You can't make an omelette, resolutely and with academic thoroughness, without breaking some eggs, or casting some pearls before swine.

Nevertheless, the other two texts presented for quick study, after the first two hours of intense reading, were something of a hard but effective déjà-vu kickstart. The first text, by Josette Féral, one of the early theoretical writings that demarcated the performance art genre, which was then still rather new compared with the theatre form at the end of the seventies, was something of a provocation. Almost everyone in the group had objections to being presented with this slightly outdated account. But then again... there was always the other text, rather more recent, from the end of the eighties.

There were quite a few good things buried in this, but also a stronger perspective on the difference between theatre and performance art, viewed in the shifting focus of definitions of the gaze. Whereas the first text grants the performance genre a rather grudging position on the periphery of the theatre tradition thanks to its apparent dismissal of encodings, illusions and representation, the second text contains a number of thought-provoking, unusual classifications – first and foremost in terms of the nature of the theatre.

Or, one might venture to say, its theatricality.

And in terms of, among many other things, the focusing nature of different gazes.

A more in-depth account of the various subtleties of both the text material and the many fruitful discussions that followed in its wake, would probably take us too far here.

Let me simply note the following: We had thus entered a special space.

A field of vision.

Whether this was because the participants slowly sensed one another, eased into the text, were guided a little schoolmasterishly through a syllabus we had not really imagined we could manage, or whether it was just old-fashioned shared good karma, will remain guesswork.
Perhaps because none of us actually ended up asserting anything, and none of us was actually a theatre theory nerd, the subject ‘the gaze’ suddenly became the linking common denominator.

For weren’t we all relatively professional voyeurs who abandon ourselves pleasurably to the myriad possibilities of the gaze, and especially an overwhelming consciousness of the nature of its presence? Both professionally and personally. Oddly enough it turned out that all of us participants had come in at a skewed angle. We were all really something else, by training or by the accidents of life. Scanning theatre, performance, film and the outer reaches of poetry, and yet still in the middle of it all.

But the passion for the nature of the gaze – we all shared that intensely.

And more or less articulately.

And so the texts had their effect.

Like synaesthesia.5

So passed the first day.

And the next forenoon.

Then we went off to Amalienborg Palace Square, which Dr. Siegmund had picked out as a particularly study-relevant object, for practical exercises.

THE INTERNAL

It seems obvious that Amalienborg Palace Square can be called an outdoor place.

Nevertheless, it appeared to us that the place could now, viewed with fresh eyes, mutate into a scene for a much more manifest inwardnesses.

For the case-hardened Copenhagener in the group, this new seeing of the place was peculiar.

An old acquaintance from repeated birthday events, nocturnal transits in snow, quick cycle rides from Point A to Point B in the hurly-burly of everyday life, and the persistent musical processions of guardsmen with a slight hangover on New Year’s Days (if you made it, that is), suddenly mutated before our very eyes into something fluctuating. A mirroring of the obvious for another kind of inspection.
‘...body is “spatial matter” – we are not merely “in” space, but actually made “of” space’

Bruce Barton
For the others in the group, who had not experienced the place before, the encounter with this genius loci was associated with a rather odd sense of wonder. Wonder at the special rituals and modus operandi of the place and – especially – amazement at our heartfelt Royalist veneration, which appeared gushing to them, in all its diffusely radiant glow.

Scandinavia is clearly not as homogeneous as all that.

Points of view, different. An axiality punctured by the bombast of the Opera.

Sandwiched between God and King and the radiator grille of the grand arias on the one hand. And on the other hand, or rather from all sides, literally surrounded by a large portion of the accidental representatives of the world population, avidly hunting for significant moments to capture, at this very place.

Well, at least now that they were there anyway...

Busy, rapt in restless staring scopophilia.

And the guardsmen guard, just as they have learned, guardedly correct.

Regular as clockwork.

Then we made our move.

All together.

With our fixed gazes. Like a rotating bunch of grapes, peculiarly clustered.
Once around. From the surrounds of Saly's equestrian statue.  

Fixed in self-created, doubly digital, living reflections.  

And then we immediately made our debut with our *Amalienborg Sweep*, invented for the occasion. And it bowled us over (and a few tourists too). In a straight line, at different tempos, forward, backward, with and without contrapuntal hops, clockwise, anticlockwise, and one more time for good measure. A dizzying revolution, a shifting of the centre, all with the precision of a dustpan with all its clumsy, spontaneous execution.  

We end with:  
Zigzag single file on the laid-out pattern of the square, a guardsman's muster combined with a kind of tourist trot (one at a time), review, passage, parade. On the alert.  
All performativity, installed.  
Amidst the ritually theatrical.  
After the exhausting practical work of the day we ate cakes and drank exquisite coffee.  
In Restaurant Lumskebugten. On the fancy side of another type of cartographical axially. 

**Reflection**  
This loose description of our activities in the middle of Amalienborg Square might on the face of it look like deliberate dazzlement. By no means.  
For this is where Féral and Lacan come into the picture again.  
But first, a brief illustrated review of some of the practical Amalienborg exercises carried out by the group.  
A: *Densely clustered gaze, rotated.*  
B: *The Amalienborg Sweep.*  
C: *Review*
A

**Illustration 1:**

Plan diagram, densely clustered gaze, rotated.

*Performative situation with theatrical stage.*

Two filmic gazes capture the turning of the group. Each gaze has the gaze of the other in the picture, notes its presence in the picture frame. The gazes of the participants are only focused on being a neutral gaze that is not much to look at. Meanwhile all gazes are monitored by the tourists (and the guardsmen, who keep an eye on us). The rectangle is Saly's equestrian statue.

B

**Illustration 2:**

Plan diagram, *The Amalienborg Sweep*

*Performative situation with large theatrical stage.*

The group walks in single file, rotating around the equestrian statue across the square, with variations in speed, pace, forward, backward etc.

Two participants (X and Y) capture the activities digitally, each from his/her own gazing-point.
The tourists and the guardsmen who are present on the square watch as the activities take place. The rectangle is the equestrian statue.

Plan diagram, Review example

*Performative action installed in ritual patterns of action*

The participants in the group stand performatively in line, parallel with the two wings of the palace, Christian IX's/ Schack's Mansion.

A guardsman engages in his ritual, theatrical walk and keeps an eye open to see that this is observed performatively.

One of the participants captures the multiple, overlapping gazes in a unifying filmic frame (Later these many ‘frames' are reassembled in a new picture/interpretative framework).

Now we (only) had to round off the programme (so we thought).

Which meant working up some performative material that could be shown in *Space & Composition*'s concluding round.

This was done in a simple way.

One group went to work editing the film material, and another thinking up something performative that could be combined with the stratified fragments of vision into a new group picture. Tight deadline, about six hours in all.

Theory solid-fluid somewhere in the nooks and crannies of the back of the mind.
Yet it is amazing what the right flow can do.

What we arrived at was the following (diagrammatically illustrated):

**ILLUSTRATION 4:**

Plan diagram, the concluding, unifying gaze (exemplary section)

*Performative action installed in symposium theatricality.*

One unifying projection (film edited from the many clips of the performative actions carried out and captured on the Palace Square) formed the fixed background for the new performative actions. These were performed as a series of ritual attributions of encoding and identification clichés from the guardsmen’s activities from Amalienborg. Installed as centred anchorman, Gerald Siegmund functioned majestically, with upheld but not unfolded umbrella, like a double lighthouse: deflector of the gaze from the audience and staring into the audience; a concluding, new digital gaze captured these activities and formed a new visual layer for future assessment and documentation.

It was a merry performance.

Nevertheless, extremely thought-provoking.

And this brings us back to the Féral theories.

If we accept that the performative, unlike the theatrical, can be characterized as a refusal to use encodings, symbols, illustrations and the representation of reality, we would have ended up in a slightly paradoxical situation. Could the material we had just performed for an audience actually be classified under the heading ‘performative’?
Or had the genre become fossilized in its own conventions, inasmuch as the performed, in the context of the symposium – which itself followed normal organisational and developmental procedures\textsuperscript{11} – had inscribed itself in the category ‘theatricality’?

For the situation was in principle classic peepshow: an audience seated firmly in rows, an area one could define as ‘stage’, in which something was performed for the gazes of the said audience. We may speculate what these gazes actually saw, and how what was seen was perceived. Whether the audience witnessed an instance of performance art or a kind of theatrical performance which by its nature inscribed itself in one of Féral’s gaze typologies and encoding classifications. Then we could re-read her Text #2, and possibly find the answer.

As regards the topology of the gaze, the Lacan text that had been handed out was in fact only a sample: from this text on, Lacan dealt more intensively with the topology of the gaze by way of studies of mathematical topology, optics and optometry. One of the important points about the mirror phase (Das Spiegelstadium) is that a good reflection communicates much more than meets the eye.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{EPILOGUE}

This brief but intense look at the gaze and the resulting speculations and ongoing visible flashes of awareness have been more than beneficial.

For me personally, they have had a considerable focusing effect in work that was begun just before the symposium: the ongoing publication of small video fragments at a newly established video blog on the Internet. On this V-log\textsuperscript{13} one can also find video extracts from the activities\textsuperscript{14} of the participants in \textit{Space \& Composition’s Workshop 4}.

My warmest thanks to NordScen for their – as always – well conceived specialist events: challenging themes, enthusiastic and well-run processes; a thoroughly generous presentation of expertise that is worth preserving – especially for the sake of the excellent Nordic contact network that comes with them as an invaluable bonus. Thanks also to the Danish National School of Theatre – Continuing Education for their contribution to the development of the symposium.
NOTES

1. Gerald Siegmund (b. 1963) Dance/performance writer, theoretician and critic. PhD on theatre as memory (Das Theater als Gedächtnis, 1994). Since 1995 has had a regular column in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung as a dance and performance critic; also a frequent contributor to Ballet International and Dance Europe; lecturer at ATW (Institut für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft) at the University of Giessen


4. Féral, a professor at the Department of Drama at the University of Quebec in Montreal, represents the breakthrough of the early-eighties generation of young theoreticians in theatre studies. The main emphasis in her research is on the analysis of the performance art genre and acting theories, although all with a strong feminist/symbolic focus

5. Synaesthesia is a distinctive faculty that some people possess: an innate ability that simultaneously links different species of sensory impressions together. Thus sounds can suggest letters, numbers colours; music can be experienced as shapes, tastes, colours and smells. The latest research on this subject indicates that synaesthesia is a starting point for special mnemotechnic qualities. A work that can be recommended on the subject is Cytowic, Richard E., The Man Who Tasted Shapes, MIT Press, 2003. It turned out incidentally that several of the W4 participants were synaesthetes

6. The sculptor J.F.J. Saly’s prestigious equestrian statue of Frederik V is in itself a remarkable piece of creative theatre: twenty years in the making, 2.5 minutes in the moulding, in one go. Unveiled in 1771, it stands there today as fresh as it did then, after a thorough restoration a few years ago. At the same time it is a masterly theatrical optical illusion, since the midpoint of Amalienborg Palace Square (the base of the equestrian statue) is 1.5 metres higher than the edges of the square. Without this difference in levels the statue would seem to sink in the middle of the square

7. Cassandra Wellendorf and Thomas Wiesner each documented, with gaze and camera, the practical exercises of the W4 participants on the square

8. With A.P. Møller/Mærsk’s new company annexe at 1/3 centre, you arrive at the following extremes: Restaurant Lumskebugten at one end, Café Hølven at Bodenhoff Square at the other
9. Despite the short time available, the participants in W4 were able to play their way to a quite wide variety of dialectical experiments that were conducted spontaneously with great enthusiasm, verve and good humour. This liberating transmutation of theoretical material that still had not attached itself very firmly to the other side of the retina turned out to be extremely beneficial to the discussions of the next few hours.

10. Showing by W4 in the large hall of the School of Modern Dance, Sunday 14th August 2005, about 11 a.m. Duration: 14 minutes. All participants including Dr. Siegmund. One edited filmic projection of the practical exercises. One final recording of the showing.

11. Symposia and conferences are now organized and held in accordance with a quite precise scheme developed by the Americans: overall theme, sub-theme, keynote speakers, secondary speakers, simultaneous development of sub-themes, workshops/study circles, interspersed with various events that support the overall theme and present examples. As a rule the programme is concluded with a plenary meeting where a number of conclusions are moderated forth.


13. A V-log or video blog is a blog (itself an abbreviation of web log) which primarily uses small video clips as its medium; the video is linked within a post (message) and is as a rule accompanied by text, images and further metadata to define the context. See also Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org) for further information on blogs and V-logs.

14. Since July 2005, at http://patalab02.blogspot.com, under the artist’s name Sam Renseiw, I have released a series of videos. From Workshop 4 the following events can be seen: Change of guards (avant) – 25.09.2005; First we have the Gaze (it’s a camera) – 23.08.2005; The third gaze (applied) – 15.08.2005; The theatricality of the performative gaze – 14.08.2005.
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SPACE & COMPOSITION included a number of performances during the symposium:

Skyggens overraskelser
by Enrique Vargas / Theatro de los sentidos at Kanonhallen

distanzlos
by Thomas Lehmen at Dansescenen

and Copenhagen Summer Dance 05
by Tim Rushton and Nyt Dansk Danseteater at Politigården
**LECTURES / 11 AUGUST – 14 AUGUST 2005**

**Morning lectures by:**

Dr. Gerald Siegmund, Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Giessen, Germany
*The Desiring Body in Dance*

Bruce Barton, Graduate Centre for Study of Drama, University of Toronto, Canada
*Making 'Change': The Composing Body in Devised Theatre*

Kristian Seltun, artistic leader of the Black Box Theatre, Oslo:
*Theatre, text – context: On the dramaturgy of spatial art*

Torunn Kjølner, associate professor and Rolf Alme, architect and set designer:
*Theatre as concept art - on conceptual thinking and visual production*

Pil Hansen, PhD at University of Copenhagen and University of Toronto:
*Dance Dramaturgy: Possible work relations and tools*

**12 AUGUST – Friday evening lectures by:**

Jacob F. Schokking, producer/set designer and artistic leader of Holland House:
*No dramaturgy, please – a report on the work of producing the opera NEITHER.*

Dr. Adrian Heathfield, Nottingham Trent University, UK and Forced Entertainment collaborator
*The Event of Performance*

**13 AUGUST – An audio-visual lecture by:**

German composer and director, professor Heiner Goebbels
*'the double space' in performing arts – the relation of image and sound, space and composition in Goebbels' various works.*

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**Theatre as visual art / Body in space**

**Part 1**
Norwegian associate professor Torunn Kjølnner & Norwegian set designer and architect Rolf Alme

*Staging Theatre as Visual Art - towards new devising and production strategies*

**Part 2**
Danish dancer and choreographer Charlotte Munksø

*Body in space – physical material development*

**Part 3 / Separate event on 14 August**
British curator, author and Forced Entertainment collaborator Dr. Adrian Heathfield

*Events of Theatre – techniques of self presentation in performance*

**Spaces of events – activating and charging theatrical space**

By British curator and author Dr. Adrian Heathfield | For stage directors, actors and set designers

**Performance, performativity and the gaze**

By German associate professor and author Dr. Gerald Siegmund | For playwrights, dramaturgs, and academics & scholars
Space & Composition II

**NordScen** and The Danish National School of Theatre – Continuing Education present **Space & Composition II**.

*Space & Composition II* takes place in Vilnius, Lithuania in September 2006; the event will be based on three workshops and will attend performing arts professionals in the Nordic and Baltic countries willing to develop and share new knowledge about artistic methods, expressions and traditions within the field of stage dramaturgy.

Further information March 2006 on: [www.nordscen.org](http://www.nordscen.org) and [www.teaterskolen.dk](http://www.teaterskolen.dk)