

To Pieces

A Structural and Practical Analysis of Contemporary Performance

Edit Kaldor

The research I'm conducting at the research group for Art Practice and Development at the Amsterdam School for the Arts (AHK) is based on questions that arise from my own practice and from my previous, and ongoing, 'education' as a theatre-maker. The aim of my research is to both develop a specific method and compile the content for a method of teaching contemporary theatre and performance to student makers that directly informs their own practices.

This method consists of the following: analysing a number of works as 'case studies' in order to expose the underlying dramaturgical structures; dissecting them

and pragmatically examining how the component elements (e.g. lights, sound, performer, spatial arrangements, image, text etc.) are used. It is my intention that the dissection and re-assemblage of these pieces be done from the perspective of the practitioner in a simple and practical manner, focusing more on the creative process rather than theoretical analysis of, for instance, context or possible 'meanings'. This will give students the opportunity to try to imagine the making process, and thus to learn from experience.

The artists whose work I focus on are all presently internationally active. Their work reflects strong individual vision, is self-authored and personal in tone. They tend to grapple with the particularities of their respective mediums in a conscious and transparent manner. I've chosen the pieces to include variety in scope, form and spirit. At this point my selection consists of: *Tragedia Endogonia BR. #04* by Societas Raffaello Sanzio; *Bloody Mess* by Forced Entertainment; *Dead Cat Bounce* by Chris Kondek; *o tâche(s) sur 1 ont été effectuée(s) correctement* by Grand Magasin; *The Loudest Muttering is over* by Walid Raad/The Atlas Group; *Fade Out* by David Weber-Krebs.

The database of materials that I am putting together for each piece includes (in addition to the video of the work) as detailed as possible 'scores' or outlines of the various aspects of the performance (e.g. stage-plan, lighting design, sound design, text and technical rider), documentation (e.g. photos, reviews, articles, promotional material, studies and transcriptions of texts of meetings with audience), as well as writings by and interviews with the makers of the piece. Especially important is all material that relates to or reflects upon the making process, such as videos or notes from rehearsals, the text, sound, video and sketches in different phases of their evolution (which shows how each is transformed during the process). In most cases I also have an in-depth interview with the artists, wherein I trace how the piece came into being, and we discuss the working process in detail.

Background and motivation

In my experience of making my own theatre works, a great deal of the creative process (especially dramaturgical and aesthetic decisions) occurs on an intuitive level. For me, the most useful part of my education in theatre has been that which has informed this intuition. I think that much more than from my formal studies of drama, I've learned what I know about theatre from the years of working with director Peter Halasz (Squat Theater/Love Theater, New York). In retrospect I realize that during the seven years I collaborated with him I actually went through a classical apprenticeship, learning 'the trade'. By participating in the creative process (from working out the concepts, to writing, to making the visual designs, and working out the last detail of the directing in many performances), I have acquired experience and skills that I apply constantly while making my own work.

This learning process was completed more than six years ago, but another kind of

dialogue has taken its place in my continual education about the practice of theatre. It is the conversations with other theatre makers, discussing concepts, watching and commenting on each other's rehearsals and performances, or talking about performances by others. And although the work is heterogeneous, my experience in these encounters has reconfirmed that there is a common frame of references, a common language, common knowledge that applies. This is what makes communication about work possible.

Each piece has its own needs, and these needs are far from random. There are rules, though due to the great variety of forms used and the subjectivity in the vision and tone of many performances, these rules may be difficult to pin down or to formulate exactly. They are best accessed by what I would call a sort of 'dramaturgical intuition'. To *Pieces* suggests that examining performances as case studies can prove to be a good way to develop and sharpen this instinct. This method of learning about contemporary performance is, perhaps, a concentrated, short-cut version of doing an apprenticeship.

Furthermore

In addition to compiling the case studies, I also organise events to test various aspects of the educational model I am developing. The first of these events, which took place in September 2005, was an informal excursion with a limited group of students to witness two performances during the Internationale Keuze at the Rotterdamse Schouwburg (*Tragedia Endogonia BR. #04* by Societas Raffaello Sanzio and *Who's Afraid of Representation* by Rabih Mroue), which was then followed by a focused discussion. A total of ten students coming from various departments of the Amsterdam School for the Arts and the University of Amsterdam (School for New Dance Development, Mime School, Dance Unlimited, DasArts and Master Dramaturgy) were participating, as well as dramaturge Maaïke Bleeker. Prior to each performance the participants were given a few suggestions regarding how to observe the piece, and themselves, while watching. When are they 'in' and when are they 'out of' the performance as spectators? What kind of responses does the performance evoke? Immediately after the performance they were asked to quickly jot down any thoughts, observations and inspirations they found to be useful for their own work. Meeting a couple of days later, the point of departure for discussion was a communal attempt to recount as accurately as possible 'what happened' during the performances we'd seen. The imaginary scenario upon which this activity was based was that the students had been requested to give feedback to the makers of the piece, that what we had seen was a run-through, and therefore that they had been asked to comment as 'outside eyes' on what they thought could be improved, while accepting the basic premises of the work.

A third aspect of the research will result, eventually, in an extensive archive of contemporary works of theatre and performance, supporting the final course set-up. The archive can also serve as a reference for students at the AHK to consult. The archive will include DVDs of performances, descriptions and press material, as well as existing in-

terviews with the makers. In addition to the makers whose works are used as case studies, the collection will include works of, among others, Rodrigo García, Richard Maxwell, Gob Squad, Lone Twin, Rabih Mroué, Antonia Baehr, William Yang, Claudia Triozzi, Kris Verdonck, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service, Kinkaleri, Jerome Bel, Big Art Group, Wayn Traub, Blast Theory, Frankfurter Küche, Radiohole, Sanne van Rijn, Benjamin Verdonck, Rimini Protokoll and Jacob Wren.

The archive material should challenge the students to extend the resources that inform their work beyond the borders of the Netherlands and to engage with innovative international artists and practices that are unfortunately too rarely presented in Amsterdam.

Edit Kaldor is a theatre maker and dramaturge. For years she worked as the collaborator of Peter Halasz (Squat Theater/Love Theater, New York). After joining DasArts in 2000, she started to write and direct her own performances at, among others, Theater Gasthuis, Stuc, Productiehuis Rotterdam, KunstenFESTIVALdesArts, WPZim.

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