

STUDIES IN PERFORMING ARTS & MEDIA #10

GHENT UNIVERSITY – RESEARCH CENTRE STUDIES IN PERFORMING ARTS & MEDIA (S:PAM)

S:PAM
Studies in Performing Arts & Media

Unfolding Spectatorship

Shifting Political, Ethical and
Intermedial Positions

Christel Stalpaert, Katharina Pewny, Jeroen Coppens &
Pieter Vermeulen (eds.)

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Introduction

Christel Stalpaert, Katharina Pewny, Jeroen Coppens &
Pieter Vermeulen

Academic discourses have constantly sought to redefine concepts of spectatorship. Theatre makers, philosophers and other scholars consider the effects of theatre crucial. In Aristotle's poetics, the experiences of "mimesis" and "catharsis" form the core of the tragic aesthetic, because the spectators should identify with the protagonists and thus feel empathy with their suffering. Within tragedy, these emotions (the correct meaning and translation of which have caused serious discussions among philologists) are often linked to the hero's fall from good fortune. Religious plays in the Middle Ages (e.g. the so-called *Jesuitenspiele*) served an educational purpose and Friedrich Schiller conceived of the theatre's effect as the moral education of a bourgeois, enlightened audience. With the – implicit and explicit – goals of theatre performances, spectatorial practices have slowly changed within the history of Western theatre. Whereas, in William Shakespeare's time, the spectators were still allowed to talk, eat, shout and party while the performances took place, in the course of the nineteenth century the expectations towards spectatorship changed. Spectators were expected to sit still in silence and concentrate on the events on stage.

In comparison to other theatrical phenomena, the audience has been rather neglected by Theatre Studies, and has only gradually gained attention. It was not until the last decade that spectatorship has been widely theorised. A pivotal publication in that context was Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*. His critical writings on the stultifying pedagogical logic in classical dramatic theatre inspired theatre scholars such as Claire Bishop, Patrice Pavis, Rachel Fensham and Peter Boenisch to reconsider conceptions of spectatorship in the theatre. This edited collection incorporates the recent developments in philosophy, theatre and perfor-

mance studies with regard to spectatorship. As such, this publication hopes to make a worthwhile contribution to current scholarship in the field.

The various contributions assembled here investigate the shifting practices of spectatorship within changing scopic regimes and the various ways in which contemporary theatre and performance negotiate new modes of spectatorship. Rather than providing a summative assessment of the various contributions, this introduction contextualizes the various theoretical and philosophical frameworks used, throughout the three sections in this collection: 1) Unfolding spectatorial positions; 2) Ethics and Politics; and 3) Interplay of Media.

Unsettling the Spectator's Position: Corporeal Capacities in Co-creation

An important current topic of discussion entails the ever-unfolding spectatorial position. The disciplines of semiotics, sociology and reception aesthetics considered the spectator as a rather fixed entity within society. Many scholars today conceive of spectators as constantly shifting entities who are constituted in the processes of performances, and vice versa. Post-semiotic perspectives offered by Erika Fischer-Lichte (2004), for example, valorise the “feedback loop” between performers and audience as the vivid energy that constitutes each theatrical performance; there is no performance without the spectator's presence. In his writings on *Acts of Spectating*, Peter Boenisch similarly observes how the classic dramatic notion of the spectator as “recipient” is no longer tenable. “We are no longer [...] the ‘other’ who necessarily complements the stage and gains a position and role (and hence identity) as spectating subject on precisely this ground of being the receiver, on being on ‘the other side’ of theatre” (2012).

The various contributions in this book provide lively examples of the different ways in which spectators are engaged in performances on the edges of postdramatic theatre, new media and the visual arts. These types of spectators are in strong contrast with what Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator* coined the “police distribution” (42) of theatrical roles and functions. In classic dramatic theatre, the audience is employed as a “harmoniously structured community [...] where everyone is in their place [...] taken up with the duty allocated to them, and equipped with the sensory and intellectual equipment appropriate to that place and duty” (42). These spectators are held ignorant about the process of producing meaning and, furthermore, they are also immobile and passive, “separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act” (2). In this publication, the “spec-

tator” is not conceived of as a monadic subject or “fixed” entity. Instead, the contributions address a paradigm shift from the spectator as a subject-position to a set of what we would like to call historically variable corporeal capacities in co-creation.

The concept of corporeal capacities implies a mode of “spectating” that involves the whole body, including not only the mind and the eyes, but also the ears, the skin and even the legs, arms, and fingers... This embodied notion of the perceiving subject has not always been accepted in dominant modes of thinking. Descartes, for example, coined the identity of the Self in the phrase “Je pense, donc je suis”, which grounds the harmony of all the faculties and guarantees the coordinating principle of the *cogito* or reason.¹ The Cartesian scopic regime unites the different faculties of a spectating subject (sensibility, imagination, memory, understanding, reason) in a logocentric, harmonious accord. But in fact, none of these faculties are fundamentally in harmony. Gilles Deleuze’s aesthetics of intensities, for example, testifies to a much more complicated network of human faculties in the act of spectating. Taking no satisfaction with the passive subject-position of the spectator as recipient, the contributors of this edited collection explore alternatives to Descartes’ disembodied mind when investigating modes of spectating. Some of them borrow philosophical concepts from Deleuze, others from Spinoza, de Certeau, or Rancière. All of them, however, wonder in one way or another what the body – as spectating entity – is capable of. In doing so, they are more in line with Spinoza’s notion of the embodied mind.

Deleuze exclaimed, with Spinoza, that we do not know what the body is capable of;² not only in terms of motivated action, but also, and more importantly, in terms of what its effects are. Deleuze interpreted this as an invitation to think about the body beyond the passivity-activity opposition and beyond the Cartesian body/mind dualism. This inevitably calls attention to the way the harmony of the faculties in classic spectatorship has been grounded in the unity of the thinking Subject as disembodied mind. Deleuze is convinced that the highest function of art is to show, through the means particular to it, what it is to think – what the body and the brain must be for it to encounter the human body as a composition of movement and rest, speed and slowness (Deleuze 1981: 166; see also Stalpaert 2005: 179-180). The body should not, for that matter, be defined by genus and species; it should not be understood in terms of form, function and kind. The body should be described by the affects it is capable of. Conceptualisations of this kind do not focus on the recognition of the identical, of the analogies within social patterns and principles of classification. In the performances discussed in this edition, there is more to the image than representing superficial corporeal characteristics, such as

Watching the Spectator: New Perspectives on Spectatorship

Patrice Pavis

While a theory of the affects of the spectator remains premature (Pavis 2007: 155), the topic of the spectator is currently everywhere in theatre and performance studies. It was also the theme of a seminar I convened on “New Perspectives on Spectatorship” for the European Theatre Research Network in December 2010.¹ This paper comprises remarks I prepared on that occasion for a discussion with Rachel Fensham on her book, *To Watch Theatre* (2009), and draws some possible future paths in an ongoing attempt to theorise the practices of embodied spectatorship.

In *Contemporary Mise en scène. Staging Theatre Today* (2007), I wrote only two pages on the subject of the spectator, in the form of brief reflections specifically addressing the role of the spectator in contemporary performance.² More than ten years ago, however, Florence Naugrette wrote a general introduction to this topic in the field of Western theatre and theatre studies, which remains one of the few attempts to focus on the spectator’s activity, even if her emphasis on pleasure was more metaphorical than descriptive of the enterprise. The use of numerous historical examples prevents Naugrette from making generalisations about “the” spectator and always places the description of the spectator in the context of the history of theatre and of contemporary performance. In particular, she analyses the spectator’s first impressions as a tension between “on one side the feeling of belonging to a relational sub-group (family, friend, lover, profession) with which the spectator came, and a feeling of strangeness at being immersed in an anonymous crowd which is also composed of other sub-groups...” (Naugrette 17). She refers to the ambiguous constellation of the individual spectator within the realm of the audience, something I coined the “fragile and ephemeral” nature of the audience as community (Pavis 2007: 165).

Affective Spectatorship: Watching Theatre and the Study of Affect

Rachel Fensham

University of Melbourne

Theatre and performance studies have been taking the spectator and the audience seriously; the questions are no longer what stimulates individual spectators to act but how they feel, and whether audience participation has been affective or not? Recent studies of spectatorship are however often polarised between philosophical approaches, with an emphasis on concepts such as the event or dissensus (Rancière), and more scientific approaches that examine digital transmission and the workings of neurophysiology (Damasio). These developments have contributed to new understandings of theatre aesthetics, image formation and mediated networks, as well as provoking analysis of the perceptible changes in sites of global theatrical production. For some scholars it is the pre-conscious, ritualistic, and transcendental, aspects of the phenomenal world that illuminate the experience of theatre; while for others, cognitive frames help us evaluate the sensory demands of new media (Reynolds and Reason). As Mathew Reason argues in a collection of essays about participatory theatre, we may not always be talking about the same quality of ‘audience-performer’ relationship, particularly given that reception processes involve a range of concepts about which there is little agreement and since actual spectators have different kinds of theatrical agency.

My own book, *To Watch Theatre*, was an early attempt to theorise the practice of ‘embodied spectatorship’, and I wanted to complicate semiotic theories of reception by introducing the insights of corporeal feminism into theatre studies (Fensham 2009).¹ In the shifts from text to performance, representation to presentation, ideology to creative participation, it seemed that there needed to be

Precarious Responsivity. Ethics and/of Spectatorship in Contemporary Drama and (Post-Documentary) Film and Video

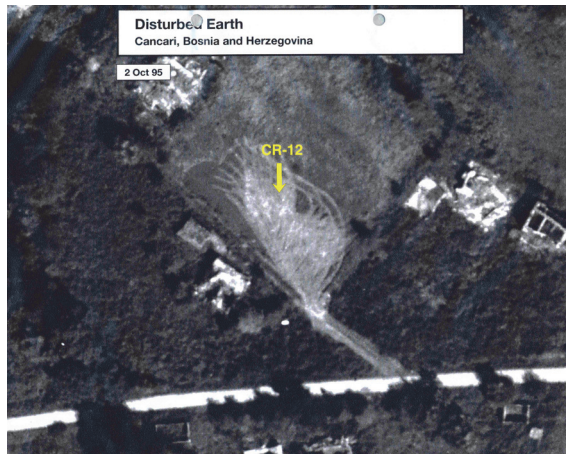
Katharina Pewny

In this article I question ethical aspects of spectatorship in Margareth Obexer's theatre text *Das Geisterschiff* (2007) and in Sarah Vanagt's post-documentary film *Elevage de poussière/Dust Breeding* (2013). Both artists are searching for non-voyeuristic positions of spectatorship from which to view human suffering and crimes against humanity. Both, however, *neither* represent the violation of the humanity of the other by means of theatrical acting, as was the case in the bourgeois theatre of illusion (*bürgerliches Illusionstheater*), *nor* do they produce real pain as is often the case in the postdramatic performing arts. Obexer's text and Vanadt's film instead act on the assumption that it is impossible to represent, act out or mimetically negotiate suffering. In so doing they shed light on one facet of this complex question, which is ethics and performance, and in this sense their work can be considered paradigmatic. In the following I discuss the question: How can these pieces be grasped in a theoretical manner?

Theatre Studies and Performance Studies have been fraught with ethical questions since their beginning in the 1920s. In addition to the *implicit* ethical questions in Theatre Studies, *explicit* debates around ethical questions have been growing for several years now. In 2005, Bonnie Marranca interviewed the US-American theatre and opera director Peter Sellars on "Ethics and Theatre" (36-53). In his performance of Euripides' *Heraklides* (2004) the choir consists of adolescent migrants whose speechless presence mirrored the social powerlessness of the spectators. Preceding the performances collective dinners took place where the members

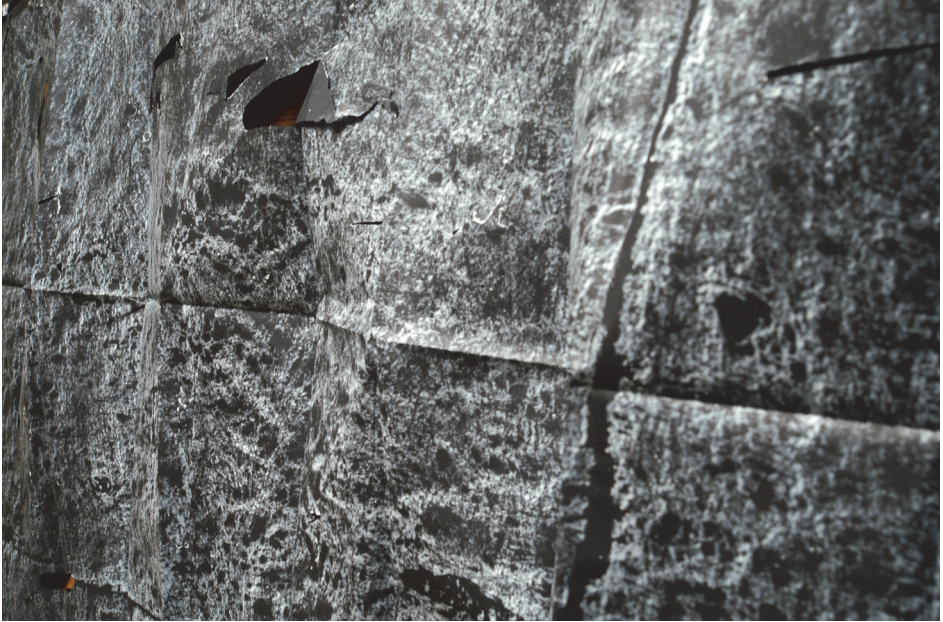
Dust Breeding

Sarah Vanagt





DUST BREEDING



The Spectator's Re-appearance in *MAP ME* (2003): Moving Beyond Interpersonal and Technological Immersion

Christel Stalpaert

What happens when the historical format of optical illusion or *trompe l'oeil* is transformed into a high-tech tool of new media? This contribution explores the illusionary and immersive¹ effect of the high-tech *trompe-l'oeil* on the spectator within the theatrical constellation of the dance performance *MAP ME* (2003), created by Charlotte Vanden Eynde and Kurt Vandendriessche. *MAP ME* blurs the physical and psychological distance between the observer – in this case the spectator of a dance performance – and the image space. However, this happens in a very revelatory manner, pointing at the conditions of our state of immersion in the rapid advancement of technology. In a very sophisticated way, the performance makes the spectator acutely aware of the mechanisms of optical illusion and hence of the potential annihilation of the subject in new media environments – the so-called disappearance of the spectator's body into technology. Likewise, *MAP ME* brings thought-provoking ethical issues to the fore with regard to the superficial way that we tend to map 'the Other' in our contemporary technological and digital times. I consider this essentialist reduction – or annihilation – of the manifold 'Other' in stereotypical and preconceived ideas a form of 'interpersonal immersion', after the philosophical concept introduced by the French poststructuralist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray. *MAP ME* is therefore provocative so far as the ethical relationship between performers, images, and spectators is concerned.

C&H's Conspiracy with the Audience: The Accomplice Spectator

Kristof Van Baarle

The Brussels-based collective C&H brings together three different disciplines. Christopher Meierhans is a music composer; Christoph Ragg is a scenographer and Heike Langsdorf a choreographer and dancer. The assemblage of these different disciplines characterises the work of C&H, which constantly seeks to blur frameworks. They experiment with the frameworks that separate disciplines but also demarcate the boundaries between the artist and the spectator. The relation between the spectator and C&H has ever since their first project – *Mites have no problem* (2002) – been a peculiar one as they abstract the event of the theatre into a ‘conspiracy’. The artists invite the spectators to an event and give them a code that enables them to understand (something as) a performance. This creates a situation where only a few people know the rules of the conspiracy, which is why some spectators see things that others maybe don’t. ‘*Konspiration*’ (2006) was the first production that explicitly demonstrated the mechanisms of this specific performance structure. The piece consisted of two parts spread over two evenings: a lecture and a performance in a bar. On the first evening a lecture was given to explain the intent of the next evening. The members of C&H told the audience that several actors were going to perform in a bar. With the help of a PowerPoint presentation, they initiated the (future) spectators in the upcoming ‘conspiracy’. The latter had to sit at specific tables in the bar and had to look in the right direction in order to witness the performance. The other people in the bar might not even be aware of the presence of a ‘theatre’ audience and even less so of the ongoing show. This is why the interventions of C&H are not innocent, “*they are also an experiment with how we can manipulate the way people look at things*”, says choreographer Heike Langsdorf. This article explores the functioning of C&H’s conspira-

Framing Technology. The Performative Trompe-l'œil Challenging the Eye

Jeroen Coppens

Opening scene. Light on. A room. Two persons. B and B. They had the same dream. At the same time. Music.

A television screen shows foggy, chaotic images, while Vincent Dunoyer sits on stage, stripped to the waist. His back is turned to the audience and he faces the camera and the projection screen at the back of the stage, accompanied by a threatening soundscape.

Act I. Dunoyer starts minimal circular movements on the ground, “[...] not in one fluent movement, but divided into dozens of fragments” (Haeghens 60). Dunoyer continues to dance typical duet movements on his own, alternating the different roles of the dancers and in that sense, dancing a duet with his own solitude.

Act II. Now, the movements of the first act are projected on the big screen in the back, simultaneously with the live projection of Dunoyer’s choreography of the second act. The empty dance role of the first part is now realised by the projected image of the past Dunoyer dancing in Act I. In that sense, a duet is taking place between lively mediated dance and recorded image, between the live performer Vincent Dunoyer and his former performance. Sometimes, both overlap or collapse, but at other moments, they fit perfectly together, offering the perfect illusion of *a duet for one*.

The meticulously designed and performed illusion of Vincent Dunoyer dancing a duet with himself, is not only interesting on the conceptual level of *The Princess Project*, as the piece deals with love and the relation to others, but also on the level

Systems of Spectatorship: Blast Theory's Aesthetic of Emergence

Rosemary Klich

Blast Theory productions, part game, part installation, part performance, enmesh the participant within an interactive performance system. They create complex environments in which spectators are co-authors, physically and creatively interacting with media, other players, and facilitators to develop and complete the work. This chapter will argue that Blast Theory disrupt the performer/spectator dialectic by creating a complex performance system that evolves into more than the sum of its components parts. Via theories of intermediation and complexity, the nature of audience interactivity will be illustrated as 'emergent', with the performance embracing an aesthetic of emergence. To support these complex systems, Blast Theory construct interactive environments that immerse the audience within the performance space whilst simultaneously encouraging reflection. The final section of this chapter will explore the audience's experience of collective creation and contemplative immersion in these complex systems of spectatorship.

Led by Matt Adams, Ju Ro Far and Nick Tandavanitj, Blast Theory explore pervasive gaming, interactivity and the relationship of real and virtual space, and since 2000 have worked with Nottingham University's Mixed Reality Lab, often utilising mixed realities within their works. Based in Brighton, the group "confronts a media saturated world in which popular culture rules, using video, computers, performance, installation, mobile and online technologies to ask questions about the ideologies present in the information that envelops us" (www.blast-theory.co.uk). They have created a number of works over the past fifteen years that utilise locative and mobile technologies and facilitate audience-generated content.

Liseur, Lectant, Lu.
The Spectator of Ariane Loze's Work

Anne Watthee

The work of the young Belgian performance artist Ariane Loze is constructed in ways that are coherent with and revolve around the issue of spectatorship. Since the beginning of her career with *Goldrush* in 2006, up to *Vantage Point* in 2012, her work – which emerges out of a creation process based on constraints – has been questioning the interpretational habits of its spectator. Loze does this through (the intertwining of) two kinds of creations: performance and cinema.

In this chapter, we will first introduce the artist's oeuvre and elaborate on her working methods or creative process. Subsequently, we will analyse Loze's works and the way in which they interrogate the interpretative activity of spectators, by using Michel Picard's analysis of three regimens of 'lecture' (112). Although Picard's theory was issued for the field of literature, Bertrand Gervais testifies that it is equally pertinent within the field of performing arts (127), since both concern modalities in which certain signs (given by the artist) are (semantically) interpreted, regardless of the media being used (Lefebvre 232). We shall base the article upon the interpretative modes, in order to circumscribe the different levels at which Loze's works interact with spectators by blurring the distinction between film and performance.

Loze's Research into the Cinematographic Editing Process

Ariane Loze is a young theatre maker who studied drama, acting and directing at the RITS School for audio-visual and performing arts in Brussels (Erasmus Hogeschool). In 2008-2009, she was involved in a one-year post-graduate programme in

Expanded Documentary¹. On “Cherry Blossoms”, Kutlug Ataman and Eija-Liisa Ahtila

An van. Dienderen

In this contribution I will first compare the notion of the viewer as I encountered her and him in my work, both in the multimedia project *Scattering of the Fragile Cherry Blossoms*, when she takes up a participatory position, as in my single-screen documentaries where she is a prefigured viewer. Afterwards, I will broaden the scope by discussing the position of the viewer in what we could call instances of expanded documentary. In the tradition of expanded cinema (Youngblood), documentary filmmakers are currently augmenting the medial possibilities beyond the classical single-screen tradition. Their presentation mode shifts from a cinema space to an exhibition space. Especially a ‘new’ position of the viewer seems to be explored through such expanded instances. Kutlug Ataman and Eija-Liisa Ahtila are two important artists investigating the implications of expanded documentaries for the spectator in different ways. By looking into the position of the viewer as exemplified in their work, I wish to explore the more performative and embodied aspects of a visual arts spectatorship. As Mieke Bal argues, the “primary task of exhibitions is to encourage visitors to stop, suspend action, let affect invade us and then quietly in temporary respite, think” (Bal). In embodied spectatorship, meaning is being created in a physical sense (in time and in space) so as to escape “the urgent passage of linear time, or what Barthes referred to as the ‘continuous voracity’ of the filmic image” (Fowler).

Studies in Performing Arts & Media (S:PAM)

Series editors: Christel Stalpaert, Katharina Pewny, Frederik Le Roy &
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© Academia Press
Prudens Van Duyseplein 8
9000 Gent
België

www.academiapress.be

Academia Press is a subsidiary of Lannoo Publishers.

ISBN 978 90 382 2598 2
D/2016/4804/067
NUR 670

Christel Stalpaert, Katharina Pewny, Jeroen Coppens & Pieter Vermeulen (eds.)
Unfolding Spectatorship: Shifting Political, Ethical and Intermedial Positions
Gent, Academia Press, 2016, iv + 191 p.

Cover: Stéphane de Schrevel
Cover image: Sarah Vanagt
Layout: Punctilio

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