
Space is Happening; The accidental in the work of Marc Warning.

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Anne Karin ten Bosch

Slide 1: logo BKVB

Slide 2: title and photo Snaren/Strings

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0. Introduction and Question:

First of all I am a practitioner, a scenographer and a visual dramaturge.

This lecture is on scenography in theatre, more specific on spatial design. I like to propose a time-bound approach of design strategies. What is according to me, lacking in the approach of spatial design, in the observations and analyzes, is this connection with time, timing and temporality.

"The word 'space' comes from the Latin 'spatium'", and here I continue citing Aronson:

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Aronson:

" [The Latin spatium,] which was used primarily as a term in racing to denote a course, distance or an interval. (...) Thus, while we may define physical space as a distance between two points, or also as that area which is contained within an enveloping boundary or demarcation such as a circle or a sphere, it is also a measurement of time. The two may be interchangeable."

(Aronson in: Brejzek, 2008. *Space and Power*, 9)

If we take the mentioned interchange ability as a point of departure, what does that to spatial design? There is a lot of interesting writing on spatiality and temporality nowadays, as there is on intermediality. What I noticed is that most of these writing immediately shift to the use of new media and the way we communicate and live in the global network.

For example Birgit Wiens in the very interesting new publication *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Bay-Cheng 2010, 92), writes on spatiality and says about the early 20th century changes:

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"The music, the actions of the performers and the changing of lights turned the stage and its material elements into temporal, 'rhythmic spaces' ". (*Mapping Intermediality in Performance*. Bay-Cheng 2010. 92)

Slide 5: Aronson 2

“But a theatrical setting changes every minute through the movement of actors, the shifts in light, and often the physical transformations of the setting itself. It also changes because of the presence of the live audience in relation to real space.”
(Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss*, 2005. 98.)

The temporality of staged spaces seems to start as an *effect* of other media. Spatial design is silently treated as a static phenomenon. This so-called ‘static space’ is comparable with a riverbed, providing the movements of performers, audio-visual media and other means. Maybe we see traces of the use and movements on its material, but these are seen as an effect of other means, not as a spatial design strategy. Even the fact that space might itself direct, organize, limit or create movements is hardly mentioned.

Time, temporalization and temporality are important subjects in postdramatic theatre, following for example Lehmanns writing on Time as an Aspect saying “ (...) *time as such* (is turned) into an object of the aesthetic experience” (Lehmann, 2006. 156). Temporalization and spatialization play their part in theatre studies, but in my view they hardly zoom in on the changes that took place in spatial design in the postdramatic developments. Aronson is an exception and I ask you to let me know of other authors.

Concluding I say that a dynamic space is according to many writers a result of the use of new media, sound and lightning on stage, whereas I am interested in the question Kattenbelt asks, writing on intermediality in his text *The Role of Technology in the Art of the Performer* (2006): “How does the passing of time become visible?” I like to add spatial design to this question:

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How does the passing of time become visible in spatial design?

Slide 7:

Overview:

0. Intro and question
1. Simultaneity and succession
2. Tools 1: Temporal Strategies to charge space with time
3. Tools 2: Spatial Typologies; Autistic Cosmos and Landscape
4. Occurrence as transformation; Marc Warning:
 - Accident
 - Incident
 - Coincident

1. Simultaneity and Succession

I am especially interested in the intertwined relation between time and space. I will propose an extension of the tools for analyzing spatial design I grew up with. The tools I grew up with were mainly concerned with subjects like location, dimension, composition and semiotics. The first and most important 'location' of a play is the theatre space itself, with its possibilities, principles and mechanism.

The so-called 'temporalization of space' and the 'spatialization of time', concepts of, for example, Kattenbelt in the publication on Intermediality I mentioned before, are influential in my thinking on this matter. I think them helpful to analyze spatial design and design strategies.

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"Chiel Kattenbelt (...) argues further that the presence of recording technologies – both video and audio - disrupt the traditional reception of time and space, such that "The expansion of the principles of the theatrical imagination through the use of live video and recorded sound can be characterized most concisely as a temporalisation of space and a spatialisation of time"

(Kattenbelt "The Role of Technology in the Art of the Performer" 2006, 24
Translated in: Bay-Cheng, 2010. 87).

Naturally I agree on the disruption of the traditional reception of time and space by recording technology, but *retroactively* I like to suggest that this 'temporalization of space and spatialization of time' are *expanded* by the use of instable media. I hope to show why.

According to Kattenbelt simultaneity of (visual) occurrences, so the 'next-to-each-other', is a concretisation of this *spatialization of time*. Time becomes visible by the fact that different occurrences happen simultaneous and show their own development. *Simultaneity* is one of the postdramatic strategies that I propose to treat as an actual strategy in spatial design. *Simultaneity* is what we experience in our daily life, connected as we are in the global network and convinced of the multiple perspectives on occurrences. Simultaneity on stage organizes heterogeneity. Different times develop next to each other. *Simultaneity* needs an audience able to make its own choice where to put attention.

Kattenbelt sees *succession*, the 'one-after-each-other', as counterpart, as connected to dramatic strategies, affirming the dramatic line of developments, leading to the climax and ending. In *succession* we see the 'temporalization of space'. Think of the spatial transformations showing a succession of occurrences and spaces. Today I hope to demonstrate *succession* as an actual design strategy organising heterogeneity as well.

Now I will take a closer look on staged spaces and their connection to time and distinguish different strategies to charge staged spaces with time.

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How do scenographers charge their 'staged spaces' with time?

2. Tools 1: Temporal strategies to charge space with time

I suggest that a staged space without material changes within its spatial dimension might be characterized as a *slow* or *inert* space, but never as a *static* space. A static space doesn't exist anywhere.

Since time, temporality, timing are part of the nerve-system of spatial designers, I will only briefly distinguish different strategies to 'charge space with time'. My differentiation is based on proscenium theatre, although not limited to it.

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PROVIDING: (Staged) spaces provide their use. The temporal qualities of the space become visible thru the use of them by performers and other media that *reveal* these possibilities.

ADDING or REVEALING: alter or affect the space by another medium.

TRANSFORMING: changes, movements of and within the material space itself.

MOVING THE AUDIENCE: creating multiple perspectives on a space by this.

Slide 11: Viebrock



'Ohne Leben Tod', Anna Viebrock/Johannes Harneit, 2004,

Direction, Stage design and Costume: Anna Viebrock. Theater Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin.

Source: Goethe Institute (<http://www.goethe.de/KUE/the/bbr/bbr/sz/vie/bue/deindex.htm>)

Providing qualities: The eye of the spectator wanders or is guided through spaces and spends time to grope. The body of the spectator relates to the space and experiences dimensions and direction and directive functions (following Merleau-Ponty). Spaces are charged with directions and possibilities and reveal something about future use and developments. Distance is 'time' and *simultaneity* is organized by creating different 'domains' and perspectives.

What you see in this space of Anna Viebrock, is an assemblage of spaces with different qualities, function and historic times. By creating different levels and spaces within spaces, she creates the possibility of simultaneous actions and by that 'temporalisation of space'.

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Scenography: Marc Warning. Proust 4, 2005. Direction: Guy Cassiers, Ro-theater. Photo: Marc Warning

Adding and revealing qualities: Spaces change by *adding* other means and media, light or video projection and sounds. I would like to stress that what seems like media *adding* changes might as

well be understood as *revealing* possibilities that were part of the designed space already. The quality, colour and texture of chosen fabrics and materials provide for example complete spatial changes by projection or the direction and colour of the lights.

Transforming qualities: Spaces changing as a result of either moving itself completely or partly or by containing moving objects, which off course can be done by hand and computer. Even the most old fashioned kind of spatial changes organised by curtain drop or black out might show visually related spaces that can be seen as transformed spaces. Whereas these spaces are often seen as one space following another 'static space', they aren't necessary designed that way. A series is immediately also a development, a movement.

Slide13 & 14



Toneelgroep Amsterdam's The Roman Tragedies, directed by Ivo van Hove, designed and lit by Jan Versweyveld. Source: <http://eraumavezumarquitecto.blogspot.com/2009/11/roman-tragedies.html>

Moving audience: creating multiple perspectives by moving the audience, guiding them through spaces.

The mentioned strategies can create *simultaneity and/or succession*. In that way simultaneity and succession are as much aspects of time as they are of space. At the same time the *sequential changes* in one medium are often seen *simultaneous* with other occurrences. This intervening, adding and editing of media and layers is part of the work of the scenographic team. Within that process, all media can be autonomous layers themselves with their own developments! I will later on zoom in on the strategy of transformation in the work of Marc Warning.

I like to make a conclusion so far:

Spatial design consists in charging space with time and temporal *possibilities*. Other media can change this space, a change that can be part of the spatial design process: other media revealing designed possibilities.

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By this the space as seen by the audience, shows the quality of the scenography and by that the quality of and the cooperation within the scenographic team.



Philippe Quesne/Big Bang, 2010.

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Space is happening and scenography is the art of charging space with time.

Even the most inert space, like many of Viebrocks spaces are temporal spaces, lasting for a certain amount of time, charged or in her case *loaded* with time. Her spaces seem to collect time as substance without any relief.

3. Tools 2: Spatial Typologies; Autistic Cosmos and Landscape

Within the multiplicity of styles in spatial designs, I think it is useful to distinguish typologies. I suggest two opposed typologies and call them the 'Landscape' and the 'Autistic Cosmos'. The distinction is based on the relation between the 'staged space' and the theatre spaces surrounding it, the offstage areas and the auditorium. Depending on the chosen typology, the mentioned time related strategies differ. Due to this it is essential to describe and analyze the spatial relations.

DIA 17:

Comparing Autistic Cosmos en Landscape

(Following text is part of the extended version of this lecture)



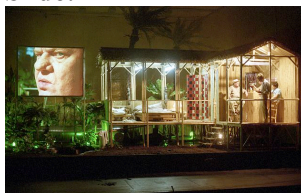
Roman Tragedies/Jan Versweyveld.

The 'Landscape'.

I suggest that the 'Landscape' finds its origins in the blackbox theatre. (1) The theatre space is visible and the theatrical mechanisms and machinery aren't hidden or even shown explicit. The 'staged space' is organized and defined by the use of objects and furniture on the floor and hanging screens, armatures and objects. (2) The horizon is emphasized by the organisation of the 'furniture' and by the use of screens. Seen in the proscenium theatre the space is stretched and open to the sides and as you can see, to the auditorium as well. (3) The connection between staged space and theatre space is gradual. One could experience this spatial organisation as an extension of daily life and staging as a visible technique. I call this a 'Landscape' mainly because of the stretched horizon and the organisation on the floor; using the word Landscape as the landscape is used in architecture or nature. In that sense it is not connected to the Landscapes of Gertrud Stein.

In such a space several territories can exist next to each other, this provides *simultaneity* for the act; actors can find their own territory and create their own developments and timing. Often areas are partly or complete hidden behind screens, walls or curtains or within objects. This can create 'offstage-onstage' spaces. You often see live-video projection used showing points of view and close ups, that are beyond the visual reach of the audience. (5) Projected video images and the Landscape seem to exist quiet well together.

Slide:



„Forever Young“, 2003, Direction: Frank Castorf, Stagedesign and costume: Bert Neumann. Source:<http://www.goethe.de/KUE/the/bbr/bbr/mr/neu/bnb/deindex.htm>

Slide:



La Vie Parisienne. Anna Viebrock

The Autistic Cosmos.

The 'Autistic Cosmos', here seen in one of Anna Viebrocks spaces, seems to have a lot in common with the 19th century naturalism or realism and the strategy of the fourth wall. Instead however of acting as if, the actors show they know very well they are acting, but they do not acknowledge the audience at all; as if condemned to exist in this staged space, completely isolated from real life, juxtaposed to it as an autonomous cosmos for the time being. (1) This being locked-in is visible by explicit walls or barriers between staged space and theatre space. No gradually connections with the sides here, but clearly marked boundaries. (2) Even if the theatre space is visible, there is no explicit interaction en no 'traffic' between these spaces. (3) There is no illusion about the fact that everything is staged here.

As I have said before, these spaces of Anna Viebrock are an assemblage of spaces with different qualities, function and historic times. Beside that simultaneity exists in the different parts of the space itself as well as in providing space to simultaneous action by multiple levels, corridors or spaces in spaces, like closets.

Instead of being connected to naturalism, I think Viebrocks spaces share with Beckett the undetermined off stage and the complete isolation on stage. Viebrocks isolation is visible by walls and ceiling, leaving out every possibility for the actors to leave, to enter or exit these staged spaces. Only the closet provides an escape.

Compare this with the spaces of *Melancholie des Dragons* by Philippe Quesne, that at first hand might seem to be gradually connected to the off stage areas, but a closer look shows the clearly marked boundaries; the snow on the trees is for example only on the 'inside' and the winter landscape is cut off from the hot summer in Avignon, where this performance premiered.

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Photo ©Pierre Grosbois

4. Transformation by occurrences in Marc Warning's organization of the accidental

Marc Warning extends the strategy of transformation by creating spatial occurrences. You will see fragments from the performance *Strings* (2002), a text written by Rijnders on the string theories, in which the actors are trying to understand these theories, discussing the origin of men and other existential questions. Marc Warning designed and organised an almost continuous stream of occurrences. He proposed to Rijnders the moments in the play for specific occurrences. I will cruelly show you some fragments and by that you miss the complete development in time and space. The occurrences build up from an almost entirely black first forty minutes to a continuous stream of occurrences. (He uses the typology of the landscape here.)

Video: Strings/Snaren, van Gerardjan Rijnders in 9 min.

Analysis:

The transformations recall the 'deus ex machina', but the purpose of these occurrences is not to bring the plot to an end or change the direction of the developments; they just occur and disturb more or less, or activate actions by the actors. Sometimes there is a connection with the spoken text or subject. The immediate or narrative 'cause' of these occurrences is often vague and the effects differ.

Instead of calling them all just 'occurrences' I distinguish them by taking a closer look on the relation with 'expectance, chance and effect'. I follow the dictionary in the descriptions:

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Accident: unexpected+chance+**visible damage** (or mess) as effect

Incident: unexpected+ maybe chance+disturbance+**no longlasting or important effect**.

Continuing one could suggest another type, the '**coincident**':

Coincident: a node on a certain moment in space, created by chance or circumstances between different theatrical means.

The Accident:

The actors seem to know that 'things happen', but do not strongly anticipate on it beforehand. They are enthusiast about the falling down of the stuffed animals and play with them. The collapsing of the empty plastic bottles seems less important, although they have to protect themselves and adjust their movements, they quickly establish and continue. The damage, mess here, can be a source for movements, actions, sounds et cetera.

Incident:

Watching the colourful circles changing we notice that they do not have impact on the playfield of the actors, other than changing the atmosphere of the space. It is a constant change that organizes different images, happening complete autonomous. We could add any interpretation, more or less bound to the content of the play or just enjoy the aesthetic appearance. The duration is significant as is the connection with the earlier occurrences. I would call this the *incidental*. Here the spatial design is performing itself.

Comparing bottles, circles and the baby:

After the first forty minutes in which we mainly saw two actors in a small spotlight and every now and then a flash of light in the darkness, murmuring of the ensemble and a naked man stepping out of a 'Dixie', a huge baby is coming down to earth. Here, although the baby is cleared

as well, we can find a narrative relation with 'the beginning of the world' on which the actors elaborated for forty minutes. I would say, a 'metaphor is happening', a layer is created connected to the content of the spoken text. Space happens here following an extended 'dramatic' strategy.

I could only show you fragments, but I hope you can imagine that designing this way, Marc Warning is creating an entire movement during this performance. This movement develops, following and creating its own rules, every now and then connecting with lights, sounds and acting. Using the strategy of succession this way, Warning is organising heterogeneity, and by intervening in actions, some of them dissolve in homogeneity.

Concluding:

In these developments of the design of Marc Warning, I see an interesting opening up of the limits and dimensional boundaries that the design of staged spaces locked it self in. Here Space is constantly on the move. In that way intervening, connecting and separating again, it is possible to create an interesting network in which coincidence can play its part, leaving it up to the audience to create meaningful associations or metaphoric interpretations. In that sense, I am looking forward to the development of the coincident, not yet present in the work of Warning. I am specially looking forward to the development of the coincident, because in our 'organized living', the coincident is a necessary escape.

For that and other developments it is in my view necessary to organize, at least in The Netherlands, new qualities in the *cooperation* between the members of the scenographic team. The organisation of scenographers and technicians, performers and directors is still a, what could be called, *dramatic organisation* of the artistic team. To be able to intervene, to add and to transform, we cross the borders of 'our' disciplines and we have to bother each other. Staged spaces are first of all happening.

Thank you!

Slide 16:

www.annekarintebosch.nl

Thanks to Toneelgroep Amsterdam, Toneelgroep Oostpool and the Ro-Theater I could study the work of Marc Warning on dvd.

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