

7. november 2010

11:30 Educations in correlation and response.

Jette Lund: The kinds and the genre of stage arts - differences and similarities - with a point of departure in the art of the puppet and performance art.

Eva Jørgensen: Contemporary education on the national theatre schools and the need for new initiatives.

To the introduction:

My background is the puppet theatre. We do not yet have an education for the art of the puppet in Denmark, however, that is not my topic today.

I am here because I have been editing two reports: One about the Basis Education for Puppet Makers in Hanstholm which existed from 1996-2000/2002. The other about School of Stage Arts (SOSA ca. 1985- 2008) - under the direction of Nullo Facchini - now closed down.

The first has a clear puppet theatre perspective, the second describes an education for what is commonly known as "performance", and is often labelled also as "post-dramatic", "cross-aesthetic" or "conceptual" - visual - physical theatre.

The two now closed educations line up with Nordic Theatre School - closed down too, and I do not know, if there is any complete report of its curriculum and results.

However, I am also here as a co-editor of a kind of "green book", hopefully published next year in March, by Independent Performing Artists Association (Danish: US). Among other it will contain "case-stories" of Danish performing artists, who have either been at the now closed educations, or have chosen to find their education abroad, instead of applying to the existing, national educations.

By sharing reasons and subsequent experiences of a number of artists this collection of material will try to fill a gap in our knowledge about these "OTHER" educations.

On this background I want to look into the similarities and the differences between the different educations in performing arts, as we know them.

(PP1)

Lacking a better term I have chosen to label the theatre forms which originate from these "OTHER" educations - "anOTHER kind of theatre", following the late Ray Nusslein, auteur and performance artist, world known - except in Denmark (professor at Hochschule für Schauspielkunst "Ernst Busch" in Berlin 1995-99).

To the question of what the different educations have in common: The forms and the genre of the performing arts are manifold and constantly developing. But the practising of all performing arts are tied to the human means of expression - the voice, the spoken language and the body - and to what one might call the fundamental human conditions: The diversity of social life and the existential loneliness. [sex is something we - in some respect - have in common with the animals]

To the question of differences:

Looking at a genre as Modern Dance opposed to Classical Ballet, they have the education of the performer's body in common, but the ways in which the body is trained and shaped are essentially different.

We have classic music and rhythmic music - each have their own musical academy and a specific education. Singing lessons at the Opera Academy are certainly not the same as the singing lessons at the Musical Academy, even if both are working with the human voice.

But what distinguishes the two systems of theatre education from each other: The one we have and the one we wish to get ?

Some examples:

1) All contemporary Danish educations for performing arts will have the language and the voice in common: Rhetoric training, training of the voice.

But this OTHER kind of theatre will want the training of body and voice to work parallelly. And it will want the training to comprise the use of language and voice in situations, where the performer has to push and challenge the body, e.g. by dancing and singing or doing other artistic acts at the same time.

2) Every contemporary education for performing arts will in some way have to relate to Stanislavskij.

AnOTHER kind of theatre will give priority to the physical approach to the figure instead of the psychological approach, and will focus on the non-verbal rather than the verbal expression - although the education will not reject neither psychology nor the verbal expression.

3) Any contemporary education in performing arts will have to disseminate a certain amount of theoretic background knowledge, for example semiology, communication theory, theatre-, music-, literature- and art history.

Another kind of theatre may acknowledge and expect that the artist makes use of this knowledge in her own work.

This can be as an "auteur" or by working in dramaturgies, where all means of expression are principally equally ranked, and in a production form, where all participants are taking part as equally ranking artistic creators - which do not mean that all of them are doing the same - they might have their special skills.

But I think no education today will carry the idea of the performer described by old Hegel's lectures from 1828/29 as "a sponge": "Der Schauspieler soll gleichsam das Instrument sein, auf welchem der Author spielt, ein Schwamm, der unverändert alle Farben aufnimmt und unverändert weitergibt". Or the idea of the performer like a marionette in the hands of the director.

So - the watershed, the decisive difference - lies not there, but - as I see it - in the performer's dealing with the object, that is: the set design, the props, the site, the room, the lighting, the texts, the sound and the overall picture.

Picture understood as "picturing" something, as well as picture as a metaphor.

PP 2: Hans Rønne, Springtime

PP 3: Tina Tarpgaard, Timemap#3

PP 4: Tina Tarpgaard, Timemap#3

Another theatre will deal with this "play material" not as props, pieces of scenery or a background drop, but as equally ranking means of expression. Or even colleagues.

Also the more traditional theatre performance consists of many different elements, which in their co-operation might result in a certain unpredictability concerning the outcome, the expression. This unpredictability will however - as a principal rule - be governed by the dramatist's text, as the point of departure for the production.

Another kind of theatre will work from and with this unpredictability.

The point of departure might here be a synopsis or a storyboard, the idea of one single scene or situation, a site or an object. If there is a written - perhaps even a dramatic - text, it may be part of the creative process as one of many elements which might be reshaped, redefined, split up and put together in new ways.

The artists do not relate to the text differently of how they relate to - say - the light or to a choreographic element.

PP 5: Hotel Pro Forma: Jesus_C_odd_size/Gritt Ulldall-Jessen, dramatist on stage.

In this process, a kind of manuscript comes into existence, which might be more like a score, but which - like any other score - forms the foundation for a whole.

These are just examples. Much is of course open to discussion. I will sum up in two points, which I find essential to the understanding of this - needed - new education:

1) Because anOTHER kind of theatre nearly always - in some way - works with pictures, rooms and/or objects - the form will almost by principle become a "cross-over" between different traditional art forms and theatre genre. Therefore, the notion of "cross aesthetic" will have to apply for the education as well. It must contain - for example - elements of visual art, including - for example - independent creative use of the visual media.

2) It is not a matter of a school putting "one more topic on the curriculum", nor a supplement to a more traditional education or a supplementary training. It is a matter of seeing the world differently, describing the world differently. It is another view on the world, not in religious or political sense, but rather in an existential sense.

[Konstanza Kavrakova-Lorenz: Aneignungshaltung /Vorstufe zur Weltanschauung]

The performer has to "push another button"

This "view" imply a different focus, which should permeate the education, just like the traditional theatre (and film)-thinking permeates - and must be central for - the national theatre educations as we know them.

An example: It is not the question of playing Mozart or Schönberg, but rather to play a violin - or to play a flute: Do not reproach the flute that it is not a violin. Do not think that the flute player is lacking skills, because it does not sound like a violin. The violin player does not have the right to define musical skills, and let the violin be normative. But of course the flute player has an obligation to aquire his/her own skills, according to the playing of the flute.

Another view of the world, another focus - I may have to try to explain further:

PP6

Some psychological research gives good reasons to imagine two (alternating) moods of human thinking: The subject-thinking, grounded in an "I am!" - and the thinking of the shifting subject-object relations, containing the existential question "Am I?" Someone or something?

PP7

The subject-thinking - that we (implicit) see ourselves as subjects - makes it possible for us to act in a world of other subjects.

PP8

The shifting subject-object relations is about acquiring the world, reading the expressions of the world, and the continuous attempt to re-define ourselves as subjects in relation to our findings.

These two ways of thinking is of course very strongly connected - one doesn't go without the other - [at least not by mentally healthy persons ...]

PP9

But in the theatre, subject-thinking is thematized by the drama with it's protagonist and antagonist.

This - the theatre of the changing subject - has literature as its primary partner, and is building on the spectator's immersion (- and partly the performers too -).

PP10

In the theatre, the thinking of the shifting subject-object relations is thematized in anOTHER kind of theatre, with its post-dramatic, cross-aesthetic and conceptual notions.

Note - it might as well be labelled "pre-dramatic" - it was probably there before the Greek drama.

The shifting subject-object relations arise in an interplay between the performer and the "things"- the "play material" - chosen by and/or surrounding the performer.

The performer uses this play material - and maybe also the spectators - as means for a change of status from subject to object and back again.

The "play materials" in their turn are given new values, according to the concept, created by the performer.

In the performance: "Tell me something" the performer is using her own body as play material and is constantly shifting her status from subject to object, a strange bird, a person from another planet a.s.o. She is

continuously asking the implicit question: Am I ? do you notice me as a person or as an object? and transforming into a subject, when she talks to us.

The incessant oscillation between the performer having subject status and becoming an object, being an object and becoming a subject, creates a great number of possible connotations and a strong, primarily poetic expression. This expression correspond to "the continuous attempt to re-define ourselves as subjects"

[A remark to the matter of content and the fundamental human conditions:

The subject theatre could be said to be more concerned with the diversity of the social life; the shifting subject-object relations more concerned with the existential loneliness.)

Because of the described use of "play material" (- objects, sites, metaphors -) this "species" of the performing arts has the visual arts as its primary partners, it prioritizes non-verbal means of expression, and it build on the spectator's constant shift between immersion and reflection. (immersion and alienation)

I am not quite alone in this.

At the seminar "The double View" 2007, Copenhagen University, about the postdramatic theatre, Michael Eigtved asked the question; I quote from memory:

"What is the "fuel", if not the traditional dramatic conflict?"

In my opinion, the "fuel" is these shifting subject-object relations, which are exactly giving this "double view".

In scholarly literature - (some coming from the puppet theatre) - they - or something very similar - are labelled:

Jurkowskij:	"opalescence"
Tillis:	"double vision"
Knoedgen:	"Subjektsprung"
Manowich:	"oscillation" and "metafiction"
Parech-Gaihede:	"inverted V-effect"
Tiusainen:	"split subjectivity"

Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 2004, e.g. p. 301
Kavrakova-Lorenz, *Das Puppenspiel als synergetischer Kunstform*.
1989.

PP11

A new education should not result from opposition alone. Therefore these discussions are necessary in order to make a strong basis from which both "kinds of theatre" can flourish - and co-operate in their dissimilarity.

The similarities and differences will substantiate and define the different admission criteria - which talent will be asked for and educated - the different curricula, their different functions and the product delivered.

Just like it is by ballet and contemporary dance and classic and rhythmic music -

By "product", I do not only refer to the educated artists, but also to products such as acknowledgement of new and emerging art forms and new production methods; terminologies which correspond to the content that is to be communicated; the formation of new theories and the development of theory.

All this will qualify the professional and the public debate about performing arts and may dismantle the prejudices (on both sides ...),

This was after all the case as the national actor's school was established in the late 60'ties. One should remember that the theatre educations as we know them are rather young, historically seen.

But alone the fact, that we can have this symposium today, is a sign that there is a growing will to have the necessary debate about the art of the theatre, it's actual state and it's possible development in the future - now.

Jette Lund