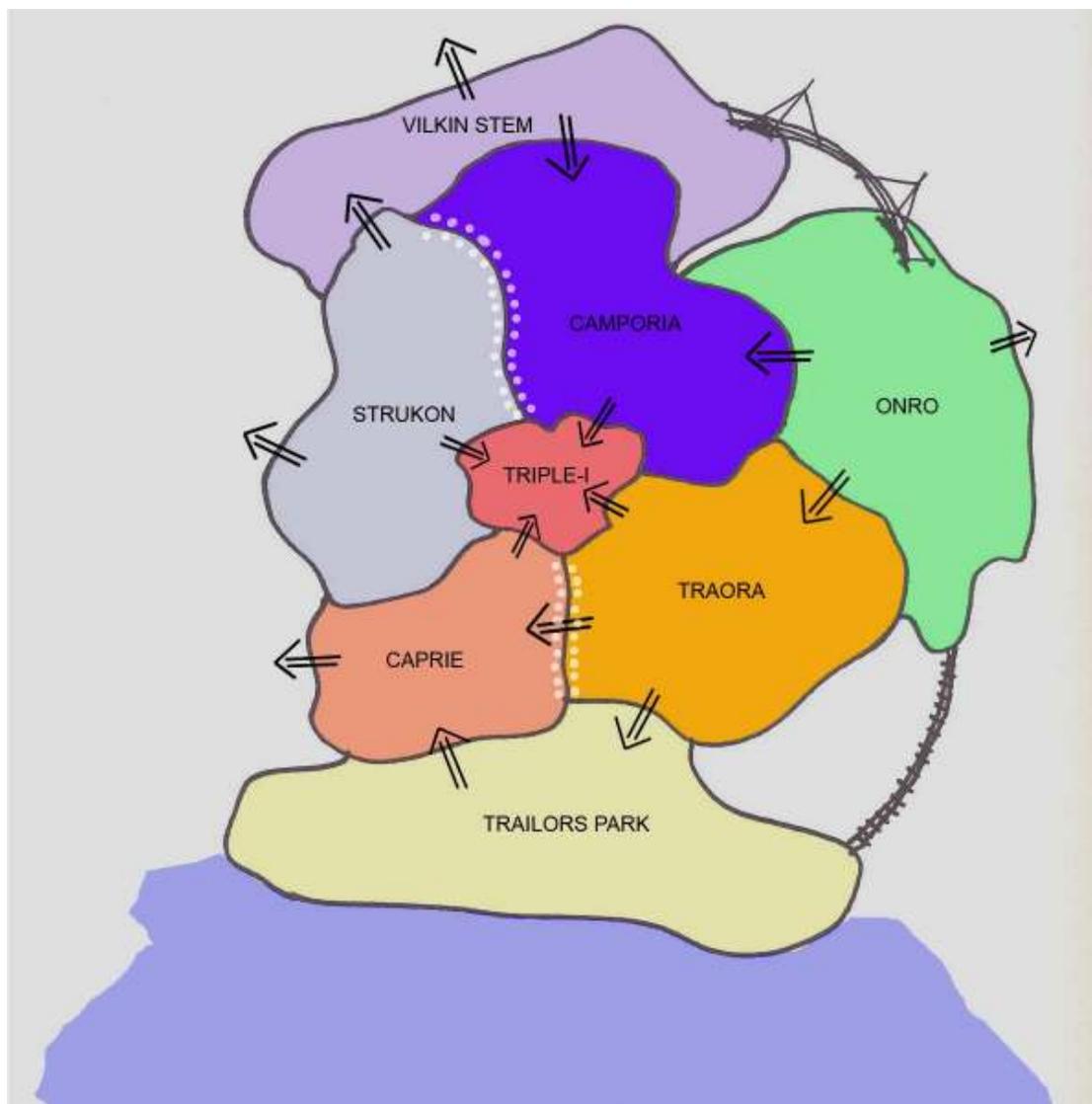


Introduction:

Practice driven Research in Art and Media - is the purpose of PRAM, a Nordic multidisciplinary network for media arts professionals, involving developers, researchers and artists.

In our analytical work, we have worked with design theoretical models based on our combined experience and tried to take forward proposals on how to develop and expand this area.

This artistic project so springs from a lot of different positions and experiences, from different needs, affections and inclinations, as well scientific as artistic. From a fascination of the possibilities of "the new medium" - the computer - and sheer curiosity. But first of all from the conviction, earned from years of experience with artistic means of expression, that they cannot be tested out except in a concrete context, an actual artistic production, defined by a time, a place, a public, a theme and a topic. Our "Journey to Abadyl" is the description of our ideas for such a project.



The project is an interactive journey to a virtual town called Abadyl, the theme is "the anatomy of choice" - and the notion of democracy - and it was originally inspired by the old tale of "The Pied Piper": The piper lured the rats out of the town Hamelin, but the town council refused to pay him. The Piper then played his flute and made the children of the town follow him - never to be seen again.

The form will be an innovative synergy of performance art, computer games and interactive installations, using film and video as well as performers and theatrical expressions. The audience is given the role as citizens of the town, and every choice made by every single member of the audience is registered through a chip, the "visa".

It is not a "role-play" - no one will have to "act as if" - but - the audience - which you may call the participants - or the spect-actors (Boal/Spolin) - will have to invest themselves and their imagination in order to feel like inhabitants of the city, to be absorbed by the problems of the city and to wish and work for its survival.

The producer's task is to make this investment easy, interesting and entertaining.

We are giving in our final report for the pre-project to Nordic Culture Point in the end of this month, and we will publish our results in a booklet, for which you may subscribe, if you want to know more about the project as such, or you can go to our website: [www.pramnet.org](http://www.pramnet.org).

The project as it will be presented today is a pre-project, a wild idea; very far from it's eventually realization. However, all our suggestions relate to already well known techniques. The new in the project is that we have defined the possibilities and the conditions to use these techniques as means for an artistic purpose.

So the project "Journey to Abadyl" represents a result of the investigations, which PRAM as a group and as individuals has been occupied with in the last more than ten years, and at the same time a frame, to make it possible to carry this research further.

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## The Director and the New Media

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"Journey to Abadyl" has the New Media as a precondition, it could not be thought without the various offers and vast amount of New Media Objects - NMOs. I would like to address the question of dramaturgy and the role of the director in this new landscape.

I will avoid using terms as "dramatic" and "post-dramatic" and instead present to you another distinction, in my opinion more suitable to describe the characteristics and the problems of a project like "Journey to Abadyl". For me the main distinction in contemporary theatre is not whether to use the new media or not - but whether the point of departure for the production is taken in the TEXT - or in the PICTURE. This is of course a simplification, which - however - I may be allowed because of the short amount of time for this presentation.

1) The TEXT is written by a dramatist, and consists of monologues and dialogues, staging remarks and other descriptions, which the director - and the production team - will interpret or to some extent reproduce. The guiding element is the text - the manuscript is a sort of score and the director conduct "the orchestra" according to the notes and directions she finds essential, and according to the interpretations of her and her "musicians". This paradigm is valid for what we commonly call theatre, from Aristotle, passing Racine, Ibsen, Brecht and Noren. We have well known dramaturgical tools and notions to describe the differences and the qualities of this wide range of expressions. This theatre form might be generally described as the theatre of the changing subject.

2) To emphasize the PICTURE is as already mentioned a rhetoric simplification. In reality is it about an equality of all means of expression, and this position implies a sort of "devising". "Devising" is commonly connected with the development of a text - but is here extended to include a way of dealing with the means of expression in general: Text, picture, light and music - as for instance recently the jazz-percussionist Marilyn Mazurs "devised" composition for "Beggars Opera" by Cantabile II in Copenhagen. The role of the director is here to orchestrate sequences, created through improvisations, and embracing all elements of the scenic expression, taking their point of departure in an idea, a theme, a room, an object and/or a text, which might not be dramatic, but perhaps poetic or journalistic or something else. The justification of my rhetoric simplification is due to the fact that the visual elements in these performances are often very strong and independent.

Here the director has to create "the score" together with her team. The task of the director is to make the different expressions "swing together" - like a jazz orchestra (or in classical terms - a fugue). The various tales told will have to melt together and each from their point illuminate the theme. This dramaturgical structure has been labelled "rhizomatic", a term borrowed from botany, describing the structure of roots by plants as goutweed, couch grass or anemones. Here is no hierarchy and no centre, every single element is linked to every other, and might develop a new web of meanings, but might also stand alone. When many different narrative layers in this way are to melt together in the mind of the spectator, it might not be possible to work with dramaturgical notions as protagonist/antagonist and linear narration, except inside the short sequences. (- it is however still necessary to work with the notion of tension -)

The important feature is, that when one means of expression "takes over" from another, there will be a shift, which might be described as the shift between being a subject, and being an object. This shift is connected to a strong feeling of "presence" for both means of expression (Goebbels). This theatre form might so be generally described as the theatre of the shifting subject/ object relations.

To the matter of simplification: It is not the method "devising", which makes the difference - it is possible to devise a play in the frames of theatre of the changing subject. However, it is not possible, to stage a performance in the frames of the theatre of the shifting subject/object-relations without a certain amount of devising.

Whereas the notions - the theatre of the changing subject and the theatre of the shifting subject/object relations - talks about the nature of the agents or the artistic effects working in the stage composition, the notions "A space for actions" and "An action space" deals with the construction of the "diegetic space" for the stage composition: The first picturing the more traditional "contract of fiction" - this is "the theatre", and actors are creating a diegetic space on stage, using the physical elements. This would be the normal situation of the traditional theatre. One might call it "a fictive reality". The second picturing a situation, where the diegetic space involve the performers interacting with the objects on stage, and in certain situations the audience as well. The diegetic space is here a matter of decision, rather than illusion. One might call it "A real fiction". This would be the situation in performance art theatre, puppet theatre and interactive theatre.

This way of creating stage art also gives the dramaturge a new role. From being an analyst of text and text background, occasionally consultant for the director and the author of the text for the programme, she will be an analyst of a row of independent and very different means of expression, dealing with their potential possibilities of acting together, not only in the start of a production, but in the production process as a whole. This function has been labelled "reflector" (Lene Kobbenaegel), while the function of the analysis is not to control or conduct, but to mirror, to call attention to possibilities of choice, and possible directions for development. The director - or auteur - is still the boss.

This paradigm is not new; and it has perhaps even closer connections to original "rituals" previous to theatre, because of the involvement of the meaning of the image. It is rooted too in a pre-Aristotelian theatre of "mimers" and later forms as commedia dell'Arte - and of course, through the use of the image, the puppet theatre, in modern times called animation theatre, figure theatre or object theatre.

*Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, Brecht to some extent, the futurists, Alfred Jarry, Meyerhold, Bauhaus, Barba, Kantor ..*

However, in this connection, speaking of performance art and installation art it represents a shift of paradigm in relation to what we commonly define as "theatre".

Practically and economically, it is clear that such a way of production is more insecure and demand more time, and so generally spoken will demand more resources than the traditional text-based way of production does.

"Journey to Abadyl" - which as mentioned is now just an idea - is in this connection a monster project, which very clearly thematize and emphasize this shift of paradigm.

Not only will the amount of different, independent expressions be huge; the audience will, through its participation and interaction, be able to draw the experience and the course of events into many different directions. If the performance ist not to end up in an uninteresting chaos, the weight put on each of the choices made by every single spect-actor, the points, where the course of

event is conducted very strict, and the points, where "things might happen" will have to be clearly defined.

The TV-project "Accidental lovers" by Mika Tuomola can be seen as an example of a similar project. Sending SMS's the viewers could influence the actions and the outcome of the play.

#### **PP 1: Accidental Lovers**

#### **PP 2: The structure**

The weight given the different choices must be a topic for investigation and experiment too. "Test rehearsals" for an invited public will be essential, as the many different possible choices, which are to be made when "building a world", hardly will be possible to test all at the same time. In turn, it is possible to draw on experiences from the computer game industry.

The identification and production of the many NMOs and the actual, physical test of them demands other professionalisms, working methods and organizing abilities as usually in theatre. And above all - much time. However - if such a project shall be an exiting and different experience, and not just another exhibition of various technical possibilities, the director with her theatrical consciousness and background can absolutely not be missed.

Which skills are then necessary for the director, which she has not already ? Of course one can and must draw on experiences from the computer game industry. But for me it is perhaps more an awareness of something, which in reality was always there in theatre, but was never a part of any canonized dramaturgy: - the director will have to develop a consciousness and an ability to identify and work with the shifting subject/object relations.

Not only, as mentioned before, to define the subject-positions of the audience, against the stage composition as an object, and their corresponding object positions, where the performance as such "takes the lead" and "decides" what is going to happen.

But also generally in connection to the role of the performer/spect-actor as subject in relation to the objects of the stage, and reversed, when the objects - the NMOs or the elements of the scenography - take over and force the performer/spect-actor to function as an "engine" for an object, and so make her an "object", the object taking "subject position".

The many NMOs, which are a precondition for "Journey to Abadyl", will have to function on very different levels. Some will be merely illustrating, others demanding interaction, others again will have a robotic character, or a function as living characters.

However, they have in common that they are never just decoration; they are in their virtual imperfection the precondition for the audience to be able to immerse in the universe of Abadyl and take it seriously, for the time of the "fictional contract", which it represent. The city of Abadyl might be lost, and if this should have any effect, the audience will have to live in and with the town, and to engage themselves in its fate. To make the town believable for an audience, the performers first of all will have to take the virtual elements seriously, and relate to them in a way, which make them represent facts and forces, objects of their interests and affections.

It will be the task of the performers to "lend them life", maybe just for short moments, but these moments will be crucial for the expression.

It is important to realize that these subject/object relations has two dimensions, an "outer", tied to the physical connection between the subject and the object, and an "inner", tied to the motivation or psychology of the relation, both of them having important dramaturgical consequences.

The outer connection might be the same, but the motivation can vary (attack or advance)

#### **PAP 1&2**

The modern director must be able to identify these possibilities of shifting subject/object relations and use them as "dramatic fuel" instead of - or as a supplement to - the traditional "dramatic conflict" - creating the dramatic tension and the fascination needed.

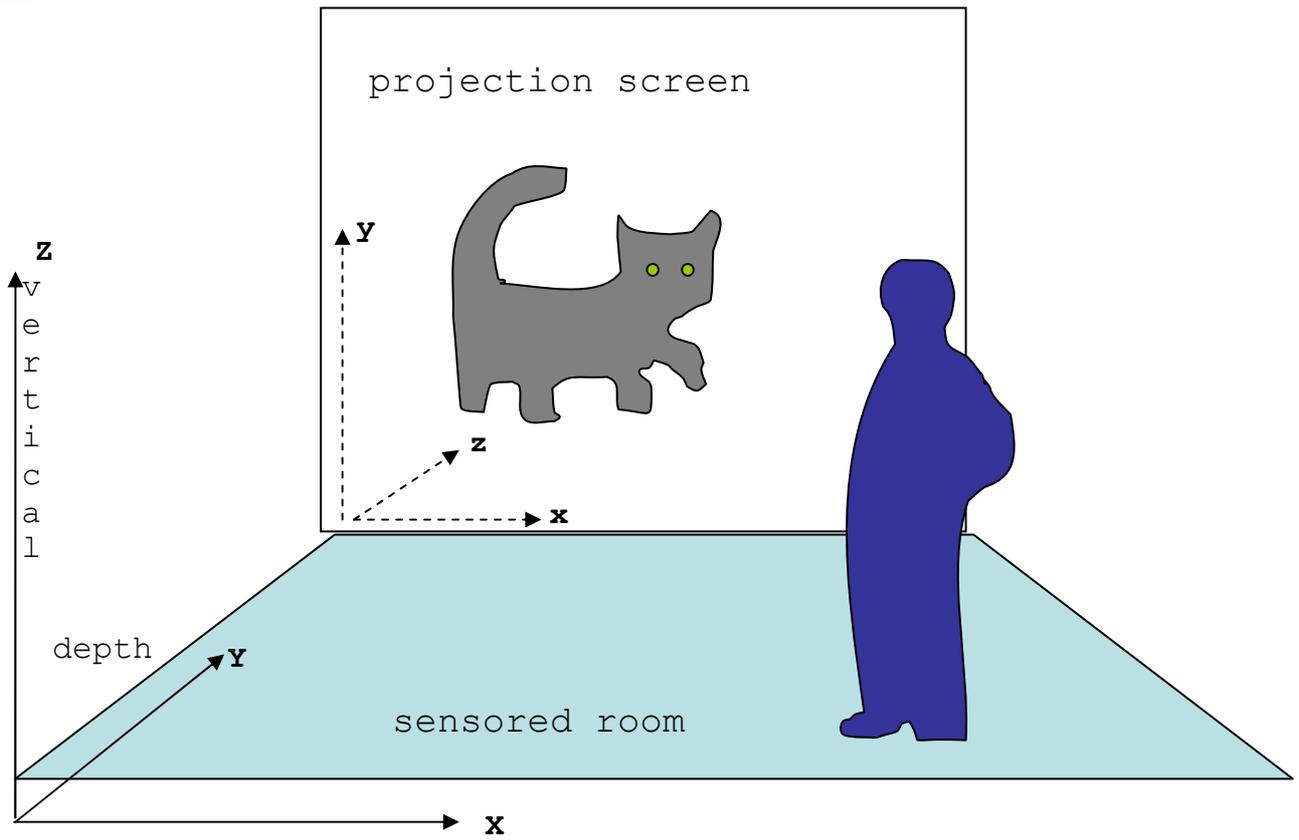
The actor's training, as we know it, very seldom includes this element. But it is common knowledge of the puppeteer, which in fact has educations, rich in tradition, especially in the former Eastern Europe.

However, the theatre of the shifting subject/object relations is not equal to the puppet theatre, the puppet theatre - whatever you might call it - should be seen as a genre belonging to this theatre "species". But as mankind has several thousand years of experience with puppets, the play with the puppet can be taken as a MODEL for what is happening, when the stage is to be crowded with different kinds of NMOs.

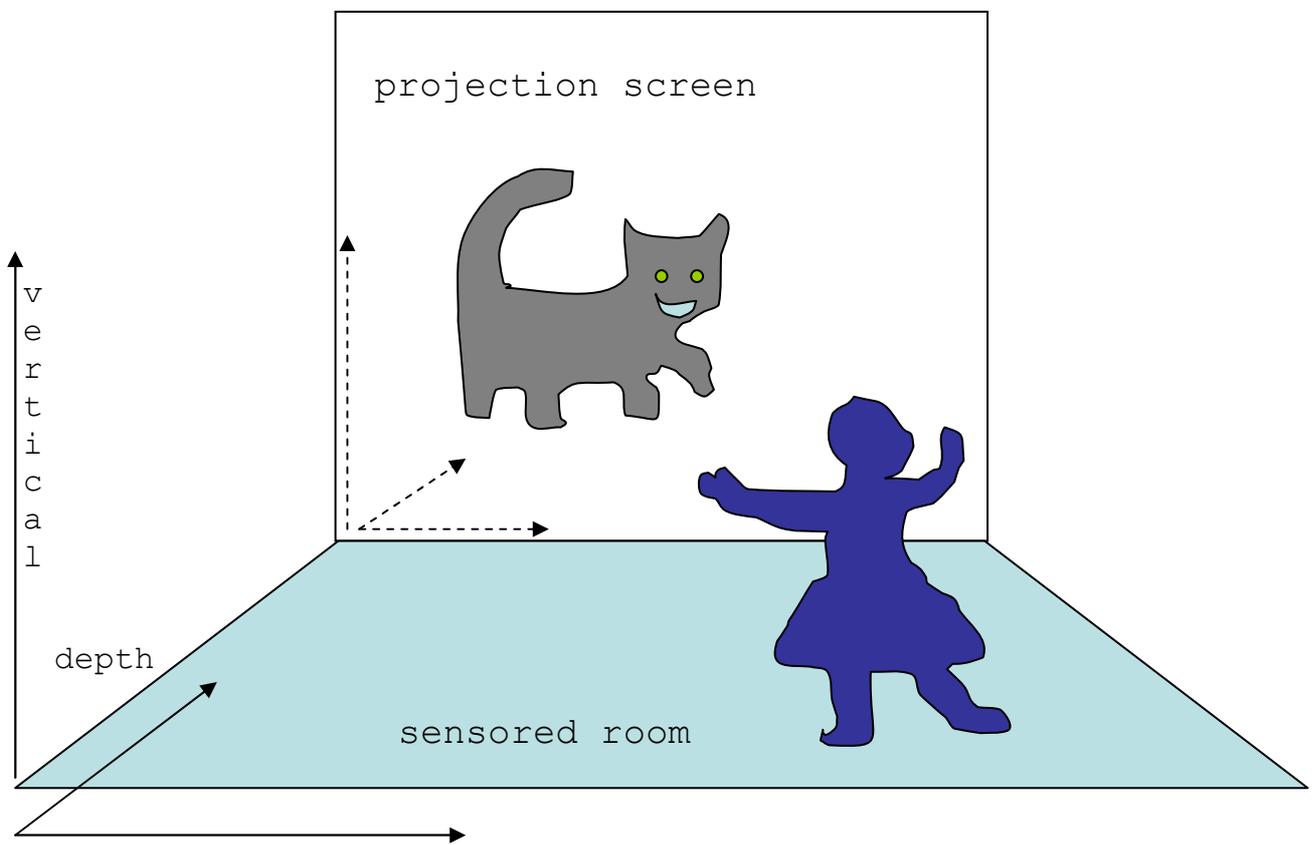
**Jørgen Callesen. Beyond the Screen, phd 2005 p.148**

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