

2.0. Document

When does a space become theatrical?

How does a space become theatrical?

In my 2.0. document and presentation I will highlight what my research topic is and how I am approaching it. I have two main questions; when does a space become theatrical and how does a space become theatrical?

I won't answer these questions with an answer, but I will give examples of how I tend to work, what my working method is, how I am approaching spaces and how I am experiencing scenography.

Necessary to understand the research is that I see theatre as time based and temporal, visual and auditive.

In my work I focus on space, the space is the co-creator and the protagonist. I collaborate with the space and let it influence me in the process of creating a theatrical space. Through site-specific performances I want to give a voice to the space and show it's theatricality.

The theatricality of a space is the possibilities that invite for movement, for a change to happen. In these spaces either visual or auditive tension can exist. Spaces that invite for movement have height differences, and differences in depth and width.

A space can become theatrical through movement or through suggested movement.

Suggestion of movement is created by the visual dialogue of light and shadows, the space and performers.

Movement can be in time and in space.

A good example of possible theatricality in a space are stairs. Stairs create movement in a space, they emphasize mobility, but in itself they are immobile.

I am showing the theatricality of a space through performances. One could call these performances live silent films. My live silent films are adaptations of the old silent films into a contemporary performative time. As in the silent films, there are no words or languages used, the sounds that are heard are the silence and the sounds of the space and the movements in the space.

I intend to make a theatre piece where I am able to give the spectator an alternative view to a space.

Their attention is drawn to details they have never noticed before, triggering their curiosity. In a filmic way I am showing the possibilities, capacity and details of a space. The space is discovered and uncovered.

I don't want to re-create a theatrical illusion, but make the spectator aware of the space they are in.

I want the spectator to feel that they are witnessing something fragile, which is not finished yet. By performing in everyday clothes, leaving the ambient light on, showing the techniques; the feeling of being a spectator in a performance is enhanced and reminding us we are witnessing a performance, that we are in a theatre, not in an illusion. The theatre becomes part of the scenography and is not just the functional building it's shown in.

By leaving the ambient light on, the spectator and performer are in the same space. They are united in the performative space and become intimately involved.

I am creating a purely visual theatre language of spaces, free from the word. The narrative is told by movement in spaces, by silence and gestures., by the play of light and shadow. Significant factors in creating a narrative, tension or an experience are time and timing.

The esthetics in which I create is the industrial era, mid nineteenth century till mid twentieth century. During this innovative period the world was changing. Progression in photography, theatre, light and film helped changing the perception of time in this changing world.

It's interesting to see how artists embraced these changes and pushed them to the limits to help them create their innovative ideas.

The main scenographic inspirations from this period are Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia and their approach towards space. In the same line I am counting Josef Svoboda and how he approached scenography.

The inspiration to work on the silent films and how movement and gestures can tell more than language is Buster Keaton. He tried to innovate the silent film by using less text. Going further into the silent film and how the montage plays an important role is Eisenstein.

As I am creating compositions which are linked to daily life pictures I find my inspiration in Dolf Krüger and Robert Doisneau, they took pictures of ordinary events, of everyday life, snapshots of people's lives.

The approach of creating a visual theatre language can be seen in some works of FC Bergman. This collective uses a filmic approach towards theatre.

The means through which I make are lumières trouvées and analogue techniques.

Lumières trouvées are lights with a history, they have been used for years. By placing these lights in a space they start telling a story. To this category I am counting the gas-discharge light, fluorescents and neon. With these lights I create a tension. A tension between these lights and the lights of a space and a tension between natural and artificial lighting. With light I tend to create an atmospheric tension, a visual tension by playing with the intensity of light, shadow, color and movement. Creating an atmosphere that invites for changes or movement to happen. To divide the lights in clear categories, I am using the terms of Adolphe Appia: the lumière diffuse and lumière active. Lumière diffuse are the atmospheric lights, the general lights which illuminate the space. Active lights are those who help to create the space with shadows. The lights are more focused, creating forms, used to enhance the theatricality.

By this game of light and shadow movement is suggested, the lights are in dialogue with the space.

Lights help to create focus, shadow and movement, they help to make the space more theatrical.

Analogue techniques are the techniques used before and during the transition to the 20th century; lowtech pre-electric techniques which are visible in the space.

When I enter a space, I look at my surroundings. And wander around a bit, I let the space influence me, stimulate my imagination.

I am looking for the possible theatricality of a space, which is (till that moment) still hidden, waiting and wanting to be revealed.

I sketch the important factors which invite for movement to occur, I sketch ideas of compositions, performers and movements. These sketches are ingenuous sketches, very simple drawings without details. They help me to clarify my ideas and pushes the works in a clear direction.

I look for links in the history of a space, to use it as part of the work.

The examining of the space happens very intuitively, following my gut feeling, my first thoughts. After a few experiments I start to examine what there is and how I could work further on this.

First of all I think of how it's looking for my mind's eye, is it what I expected, is this working for me, am I missing something, where is it referring to?

Secondly I look to my "real" eye, what do I see, what is happening?

In my approach in finding when and how spaces can become theatrical, it's important to discover new spaces and invite peers to see or experience the work.

To be able to understand how movement was seen in space and how theatrical spaces evolved, I am planning to read more books on these subjects. I will particularly read books from/about Appia, Craig and Svoboda.

I see my process and experiments as part of my scenographic work. All the experiments are filmed. The videos are showing what movement happened or what movement was suggested.

My background as a technician is helping in how to see possibilities in a space. I am using my technical skills to help me create.

In Culemborg I placed myself as the performer in the space. Together with the space one of the leading characters. This semester I am questioning my presence on stage. I will place myself as me, as a scenographer in the space. A person who is showing the theatricality of a space in a honest and personal way. I am like a black silhouette co-existing in the space.

I am also questioning what a performer could be. Is it a light, an object, a person, a space...?

The mind map that I made is very sober, just words and lines. This clear design helps me to focus more on what I am researching. It helped me to figure out what I find interesting, or what is deserving more attention and to find links between the different thinking processes and subjects, by these links new subjects and interests started to exist.

I have several experiments on which I am working. I will explain briefly what I am examining or wanting to achieve in each of them.

- *Working with iron roofwork in Pastoe*: what is it why I get attracted to certain details in this space? How can this space (in which we are every day) become theatrical? (Boundary of spectator-performer-time) How can I link the history of a building to my history and make it a personal story?
- *Lights and theatricality*: what is the boundary of a light? Until what limit can a light still illuminate? What is the border of a light? How can a light create tension?
- *Performing objects*: what is a performer? Is it a human? Is it an object? Is it a light? Where is this boundary?
- *Adapting Higher (Culemborg) to a Blackbox*: trying to find the important qualities which make my esthetics stand out, what is the influence of a specific space on a performance, is it possible to recreate this? How can I see a theatre space as a location?

Questions for my research/ for the audience

- When does a space become theatrical?
- How does a space become theatrical?
- What is the site specificness of a theatre? Or what could that be? How can we, as scenographers, question or challenge this?
- What is a performer? (Space-person-light-object)
- How to create theatrical tension?
- What is the relation between the spectator and performer?
- How are they perceiving time?
- How can I become a scenographer in a space and not only a performer?
- How can I investigate a space as a scenographer?
- There is a small boundary of the moment when a space becomes theatrical. But where is this boundary? What is it that makes a space theatrical?
- ...

Books to read

Gordon Craig on movement and dance, Edward Gordon Craig, 1978

When I was a photographer, Félix Nadar, 1900

Sergueï Eisenstein about Charlie Chaplin, Sergueï Eisenstein, 1939-1941-1945

Craig on Theatre, J. Michael Walton and Edward Gordon Craig, 1983

L'Oeuvre d'art vivant, Adolphe Appia, 1921

A study for Movement, Edward Gordon Craig, 1906

Dive into the work, theories of Josef Svoboda.

Eisenstein his theories about montage.

Poems, quotes...

De geur van tijd

Tijd heeft een geur
ik heb hem zelf
geroken toen mijn vader
het liet zien
het oude kerkje
bij Wijns in Friesland.

'Moet je eens kijken,' zei hij.
'Je ruikt hier een paar eeuwen.'
Ik keek, stak mijn neus
naar voren.

En tussen de muur en de deur
rook ik tijd
stof en verheven woorden
vreugde, oude kleren
tranen en hout.

Remco Ekkers, 1996

By making I make, by making I think.

*When you leave a space you always leave an impression, a memory behind.
The space changed.*