

## STARTING POINT

I was invited to do a new piece for the Muiderpoort Theater's "ColourDance Festival". It's a festival of non western dance, and the dance programmer of the theater (a graduate from the SNDO) likes to bring in also modern/contemporary dance work into it, within a theater that's mainly neighbourhood/community oriented.

The festival had a theme: metamorphosis. Somehow, the work I produce for the festival is expected to relate to the idea of metamorphosis.

## WHAT IS THE PIECE ABOUT?

It's a criticism to a cultural practice that seems to perpetuate a social reality, but presenting itself through a rhetorics of plurality and equality.

## AN OLD REFLECTION ABOUT THE THINGS I WANTED TO SAY

Every time I tried to present this project, or share it with someone, I felt quite stupid.

Everyone's first question was: "But what do you want to say?". And the problem was (is?) that I don't know for sure. I still suspect that it's many things, but I don't know them exactly...

There is a fear I need (and tried, in this process) to overcome: is it ridiculous, or ineffective, to pretend to do a work about a specific kind of content, but not to know wich content? How to explain this necessity? I suspect that it can be understood, the necessity, but of course in the end is not enough.

## ISSUE OF CONTEXT

The context in which to produce socially engaged art is fundamental. It affects not only the content and form but also determines to which extent it can be effective, by defining its area of influence. Does the performance affect only the audience that sees it? I feel that it's more reasonable to be active in the third world in order to transform it. Can I transform Argentina if I live in Holland?

## A LOOSE REFLECTION

At some point I realize my project is not about the Non-Western (why would it, or why would I?), but about the Western.

## ONE QUOTATION

Marta Traba, in "Arte latinoamericano actual", Caracas, Ed. Biblioteca de la Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1972

"(Al artista latinoamericano) La realidad cotidiana lo golpea con tal fuerza que le impide aislarse dentro de los problemas de su cultura; (...) hay en este empeño un real anhelo de que le crean y de que tomen en serio su posible peligrosidad. El artista quiere ser peligroso en Latinoamérica porque comprende que su misma lucidez y el privilegio de formar parte de una élite cultural en países de muchedumbres sobrevivientes, le exige ser, de alguna manera, un factor que contribuya al cambio de las estructuras férreamente sostenidas por los sistemas vigentes."

"(*The Latinamerican artist*) *is hit by everyday reality with such strength that it doesn't allow her to isolate herself within the problems of her culture; (...) in that insistence there is a real desire to be trusted and that her potential dangerousity is taken seriously. The artist wants to be dangerous in Latinamerica because she understands that her lucidity and the privilege of being part of a cultural elite in countries of surviving crowds, demands that she becomes, somehow, a factor that contributes to changing the structures solidly held by the current systems.*"

## HOW DO I SEE MYSELF

The invitation made me feel like a foreigner. It made me realize how much I take for granted my "europeanness", my "western culture", a 3rd world person raised within a very eurocentric vision of the world.

AFTER WRITING SOMEWHAT RANDOMLY I START CUTTING AND PASTING, GROUPING AND GIVING TITLES IN ORDER TO ORGANIZE MY THOUGHTS

## COLLECTING QUESTIONS

why was I invited to a non western dance festival?

how am I seen by this programmer?

and then, of course, how do I see myself?

which audience does the piece adress?

what do you want to say?

what is the piece about?

does the performance affect only the audience that sees it?

can I transform Argentina if I live in Holland?

is it possible to be political, that is, to generate social change through art?

what can a political theatre deal with?

which audiences can it address?

can political performances be dangerous? Is there a real power in

performance to subvert established institutions and power relations?

what are the intentions of an argentinian student who does an african dance

piece for a non western dance festival in Amsterdam at a private theater

subsidized by the dutch state?

what are the really contemporary political issues?

## STRATEGIES - EFFECTIVENESS, MAKING THINGS CONCRETE

In my head	In my body	In the piece
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Reading</li><li>Writing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Dancing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Contradictions and ambiguity</li><li>Sense of humor</li></ul>
<p>← allow myself to drift →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Give my writing out for others to read</li></ul>	<p>← Give my dancing out for others to read →</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I allow myself to write questions that I don't even try to answer</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Observing the frames of other performances (their printed material, their names, the prices of their tickets, the clothes the audience wears, the programmes in wich they are presented, their predictibility, the formalities in the event of assisting to the performance)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Time framed exploration: pick an idea (e.g: shaking) and explore it for a predetermined ammount of time</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Fake ending, mixing up reality and fake stories</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Interviewing people about their preconceptions on african dance (paper/ video)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Trying to reproduce those preconceptions (imitation) or to go against them completely</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Audience placed in a circular layout</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Asking myself and others questions: how does african dance look like? describe african dance show african dance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>To reproduce this elements on different discourses: naïve (to really perform these clichés, as if believing in them), oposing (to perform their oposites), ironic (how to perform them in a way that implicates also a comment, a remark on them; to perform them in an unlikely but still recognisable way?)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Titling, handing out a program, framing</li></ul>
<p>← dialog with other artists: Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Joaquín Torres-García →</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Honesty, inclusion/sharing/use of personal issues and stories; Self-mockery, vulnerability</li></ul>

## AN OLD DRIFT

Who am I doing all this discussion and research for? For me?

For the project? For the festival? For future generations? For other artists? For the audience? What do I want to present? I want the research to support the piece? I want it to be a valid research (and then again, valid by what values?) that others can approve? Should there be a document produced in the end, that presents written results? And what would it do, legitimate the piece, the research, the content, the process, the tools?

## A NEW ISSUE

Outdated political problems, like the validity or actuality of ideas like communism and socialism.

What are the really contemporary political issues? That is obviously different in different parts of the world. This being out of synch of the world... Some themes seem more hip than others. But I feel that the developments/progress of problematics also tends to mask other (older) problematics that are still valid and in force in disempowered places of the world. Which makes me reflect about the construction of narratives, historical and political narratives, and again to points of view. But I leave that for the next piece of writing, and the next piece of dance.

## AGENDA

What can a political theatre deal with? Which audiences can it address?

Identity seems to be a preferred/priority issue for political theatre. Since performing is, somehow, assuming (temporarily) other identities, it seems natural that all political issues related to identity can be easily addressed by theatre. Identity also seems important because of it being defined socially, so any addressing of identity adressess social codes, agreements, conflicts. And theater is also a social event.

Also the politics of culture and the politics of the cultural markets seem to be accesible for discussion through performance. This includes multiculturalism or interculturalism, cultural funding and government subsidies, official programming, etc.

### A SHORT ANECDOTE AFTER THE LAST PERFORMANCE

By the end of the performance of the 18th of may, in the Muiderpoort Theater, I had two brief but very interesting talks. The first man with whom I spoke told me that he had really appreciated the fact that, after the piece was finished, I spoke a little bit about it, sharing my toughts and ideas, and my reasons to create the piece. What he seemed to have missed is the fact that, after people clapped and I bowed, all the text section that followed (including the statement of an obviously fake identity and the attempt to change the color of my skin by holding my breath and turning red) was still actually part of the performance. The second strange story I heard came from a man, of chinese descent, that was born and raised in Suriname but lived already for almost twenty years in the Netherlands. He said he was touched by the dancing section of the piece, because it reminded him very strongly of the two years he spent living in the woods with bos negers (literally, negroes from the woods\*). He said my dancing was just like their rituals, and their dancing, and their hunting, and that it just took him back to his years in the wilds. This two incidents were very striking (and pleasant) because they made me think that the construction of the piece is then more or less solid, enough for people to really follow or buy the story I was presenting in the first (danced) section. Eventually the idea would be that people realize that I'm trying later to subvert what I presented at first, but if they go with the first impressions is also a good start.

But the greatest moment came a couple of hours later, when I was cycling home. I was suddenly struck by the thought "What if they were fucking with me? What if they were also telling me fake stories or being ironical?"... And I started laughing, not only because of the perspective that these people could have had the need to come up with such a creative response to the piece as turning it back to me... I had to laugh at the impression that the piece ended up making me maybe more suspicious than the audience, to the point of even distrusting their reactions.

\* bos(ch) negers are, I think, descendants of escaped black slaves, that established themselves in the woods of Suriname... something so strange as a **transplanted** tribe of "natives"?