

## **'Soft' vs. 'hard' performance as postspectacular directing**

Extract from the book THE MARGINAL THEATRE by Knut Ove Arntzen

I have already stated that the term Catchment Area is used to describe a physical field of attraction, which may imply that the audience will have to relate to being both subject and object in a stage production of a participatory or ambient kind as I would like to respond to it (Helavuori in Sutinen, 2005, p 74). In this lies the possibility of extension in direction of the interactive and ambient spectre of the field of physical attraction. Concerning the act of telling something in theatre, Helavuori writes that Catchment Area makes use of the concept of narrating in a strategic sense, that is, in order to affect the relation between the act of showing and watching what is shown, so that the eye itself becomes a metaphor of the position of the spectators (Helavuori in Sutinen 2005 p 72.)

I think the Catchment Area is of importance to describe what happens when objects are put into motion and interact accompanied by sound, music and text. This can be exemplified in the works of Heiner Goebbels. His productions are based on objects and music, for instance in the production *Stifters Dinge* (2004), and they can be characterized as weak or soft performance. Hans-Thies Lehmann has explained Goebbels work as visual installations in direction of a 'light' staging (Ibsen award conference in Skien, 10.9. 2012.) Ibsen awarded Heiner Goebbels is according to Lehmann an example of a director working in a style where there is 'no illustration' and 'no narration', or as Goebbels expressed it himself in the Ibsen Award Speech: *Experiencing in theatre is what happens in the audience not on stage* (10.9. 2012). This kind of theatre then can be spoken about as a theatre of operations as demonstrated in *Stifters Dinge*. There was no actors visible and a mechanical working machinery reflecting lightening effects, colours and screens with water as part of a polyphonic expression toward a 'collage of senses'. This way the audience is turning into actors or dancers themselves in a kind of 'slow storytelling'.

There is an approachment to a new kind of marginality of an ambient kind going on the the years since around 2007, but now I want to expand the notion of ambient theatre in direction of post-drama or the postspectacular, like in relation to Heiner Goebbels. In my opinion the already cited concept of Catchment area is a key word to understand this approach as a way of directing or choreographing without any interpretation by an actor, but which is based in the operation of a situation, in which the actor or dancer is more of a stage worker and action artist in the scenic operation. Goebbels has contributed to develop a theatre esthetically marked by absence in the sense of absence of narration and illusion. There is no story telling in the narrative sense, but it is more up to the audience to define the situation. Goebbel's creation of a soft, but to some extent mechanical telling machine, is leaving it to the audience to define what is happening. This approach is similar to the way Verdensteatrets has used sound in combination with technical installations in productions like in *Konsert for*

Grønland (Concert for Greenland, 2004) and When all the question marks started to sing (2010).

André Eiermann has summed up these tendencies in a concept of post spectacular theatre Theater (Eiermann 2009), which indicates at theatre which is based on what could be referred to as paraperformance, working on objects in machine like stagings of them, operated by visible or invisible actors or operators. The performative genre of performance lecture is one example of social interactive lecture creating performative actions in neutral spaces. The telling is not a story telling but a real time presentation, like in the work of Otmar Wagner from the German performance art 'Stammtisch' milieu. Within dance this has been used as an element in like with choreographers Xavier LeRoy, Jérôme Bel, Mette Ingvartsen as well as Katrin Deuffert and Thomsas Plischke. Choreographers and their dancers or performers are preparing for the spectators to take active part in a theatrical situations based on shared experience. This was the case with the production of **ALREADY MADE THEATER** in the E & G Theatre in Stamsund at the Lofoten International Theatre Festival in 2012, made by **Igor Koruga, Nina Kurtela and Sonja Pregard** from respectively Serbia and Croatia. They used the theatre building made of tin can as an installation with it's main gate, outside of which the audience was seated as to look at it, and suddenly there is the Stravinsky music coming as a big pulsation. The whole situation is turned into a concert with the tin can house as a soloist. Then the gate opens and the audience enters into a kind of labyrinth. There are now actors or dancers to see, only som 'helpers'. This was indeed a soft performance in a metetallic, hard setting. An emotional space was established, and the audience as a part of it as in a social situation.

Generally stated the spectators' relationship to the performance is more and more marked by weak or soft performance in smaller scaled performance, and in a more 'hard' performance when it comes to using the big stages of the Italian baroque tradition. In both cases there is an establishment of some common, ambient strategies and relational actions. They work in soft performance on ritual and rhythm as well in rythmic spaces without any axis of illusion. In hard performance and directing in the continuation of classical-modernist styles of directing, the illusion is something played with in a neo-mimetic and ambient kind on a big scale. In both cases the catchment area is put into working through physical attractions created by operations through interaction and by the help of technical devices in the scenography. One could speak about an iconoclastic space to be defined as post-spectacular. The spectators are not anymore looking at A performing B to C. As a replacement the spectators are themselves by interaction transformed into intermediators, responsible for the ceremonial of what happens inbetween A and A, so that C, the audience, is becoming a part of an action space taking part in a ritual or documentary show.

In theatre and dance as well, this will result in a new scope or different degrees of relational and ritual integration. Theatrical productions in the years to come will more and more work on different relations to the audience, challenging the act of specatorship. Risk or the feeling of risk will also be a part of such strategies, like I explained it in the social, artistic and theatrical

projects of a company like GM Salong as mentioned chapter 10. In postspectacular theatre there will be no evident seduction of the audience through illusion or illusive actions, but more teasing and a relational approach in a kind of new melodramatic sense, or even the melodrama of ambient directing. There will be guidance by artists who are more or less present in the theatrical situation. The audience is turned into participants. This is corresponding to a shared catchement area, inside or outside institutional spaces.

Generally said, it seems that aesthetics and context have melted together, often based on new authenticity and reorientation towards or recycling of modernism or postavantgarde or even postmodern styles of documentary theatre, mixed up with ambient settings and the postspectacular in weak/soft or insisting/hard performance. In new performance art as well as in recent trends the audiences' relationship with the performance is increasingly participatory in an emotional space, which is shared by audience and actors. This is the ultimate result of how ambient influences in directing more and more is turning into mainstream.