

UNFRIENDLY TAKEOVER

Mårten Spångberg: "Extra Clear Power" Lecture performance, Frankfurt, 8. 7. 2004

(Start with David Gale – speak it and show the video)

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen I will do this performance in English and if you have questions at the end of this performance I will be glad to answer.
The title of this performance is: "Lecture".

-In 1987 I started to work on my thesis for my Ph.D. in molecular and cellular biology and at the same time I began to go to dance classes one time a week.
I finished my master degree and I received a scholarship from the French government to write my thesis. I was admitted to work in a laboratory specializing in research on Breast Cancer and hormones. The same year I started to look at a lot of dance performances during the summer festivals in the south of France where I lived.
I was still playing Basket-ball and my body was trying to get some stretch.

(I leave paper and microphone go 3 steps on the side. I do a stretching exercise bending my torso over trying to reach the floor with my hands (20 light bounces). My hands don't go further then 20 cm from the floor like it was at this time (1987). Then I return to the microphone.)

How often haven't we read about, how theatre starts in some ritual somewhere in a warmer climate? Beautiful looking creatures stepping out of their cave dancing around to celebrate the sun, or in one or other Jean Amuel novel, how some old guy painted white makes the whole tribe go wacko (today we know it was not the Gods but some groovy plant that made people go wild). But come on do we who work in the genre deserve that, however enthusiastically performance studies et. al. has pushed for it, we usually skip that part and dig deep into whatever theories somebody can have referring to anything which keeps its dress code at least semi-academic. Why don't we just skip this part of the archive, vague and volatile, as a mistake, a sort of strange off-spring like one of these millions of developments of the species that just made it a couple of generations. Instead, can't we just consider that dance and theatre started with a decent conversation, a dialogue á la Plato – Yeah, let's just get rid of the troubadours as well, after all it most of all resembles street theatre, or why not start with politics and argue that performance started with one party trying to convince the other – indeed what's the difference between a glass of champagne in the foyer and to smoke the peace pipe.

Through out the history of theatre one also encounters some of the most exclusive shows, needless to say pranks in the realm of lecturing. The Swedish king Karl XII was famous for being an exceptionally sceptical audience. When somebody made *audience* and started to lecture, he just shut up until

the person/actor was so embarrassed that he left (it is said that a very important Spanish messenger on a mission from the King waited for no less, in complete silence, than 21 hours. On his return to his motherland he was thrown to wild animals. His life was fulfilled through another of these ritual we really could be without).

Andy Warhol was in the beginning of his career invited for a lecturing tour in US universities. Only at the 7th stop did somebody realise that the lecturer was not at all Andy Warhol but Mr John Smith. A chap Mr Warhol had hired to do the job. Andy was sued but won the trial. Laurie Anderson on the other hand, did teach art history at some collage but since the students were so bored she started to change the stories, not to amuse the students but her self.

We also know about terrible outbursts of anger performed by Wittgenstein in his lectures in Oxford, or Leibniz who tended to vanish when a good idea showed up (he is supposed to just have walked out of the room, index finger over his lips muttering equations and litanies against alchemy), or Kant for that matter that is said to have shown up at lectures wearing women's clothing (however our sources are in this case vague).

Intense is certainly the video documentations that exist from the late seminars of Jacques Lacan, who we know almost exclusively for his lectures not his writing, who enacted his lectures with an intensely theatrical tone, baroque and fully artificial.

It is now not only strange things that can happen in lectures. In a short passage in Mallarmé's *Quant au livre* he mentions, however ambiguously, a fellow French thinker giving a lecture so beautiful that his eye and heart was filled with tears. Kirkegaard, also, recollects the most poetic moments when attending lectures. In his *Erotisisme* he describes instants of sublime understanding, moments where heaven and earth came together in a time at the end of times. An erotic fulfilment which made him marry knowledge instead of woman, however it didn't mean that he stayed out of women's company.

We should certainly not forget all the movies we have seen where strange things has been encountered behind the Rednerpult...

Anecdotes themselves could of course fill a whole lifetime of lectures.

And we shall go on just a little bit longer before...

"...thank you for your attention..." It is said that Einstein during an energetic lecture lost a shoe. What he talked about is history but his performance will be remembered. When Luis Buñuel introduced his work in France for the first time – in what we today know as artists'-talk -, he asked his friend Dali to drive by the building on full speed whilst honking the horn violently, and at a given moment, at the end of the lecture, crash into a street lamp next to the lecture room. It was a given success; an absurd act where the talk and the performance produced a third event.

In an anecdote told by Heiner Muller during a lecture - I heard it in Helsinki -, Markuse had an enormous nose. Bloch was said to have counted hundred dollar bills in a basement in an all American bank during the war. That Walter Benjamin danced with Alister Crowley and Fernando Pessoa at "Boca do Inferno" outside Lisbon, and that Allan Turing happened to fall asleep whilst bicycling. Thought needs spectacle, philosophy is a show.

Adorno was a great seducer. Brecht was married at least half a dozen times. Diderot could turn any woman inside out in five seconds, not to mention his audience. Ethics of performance in the hands of thought. Rhetoric, the choreography of speech. How can we today argue for an ethics of performance as we enter a room without doors, the theatre.

When Isaac Newton demonstrated his alchemic hypothesis at the Royal Society, he blew up half the building. Something went wrong!

When Apple presented their first computer, the demonstration ended with such a tumultuous situation, with journalist screaming and concurrents ripping their hair, that Daniel Ocean, a local hacker, managed to steal two of the three exiting prototypes. Something went wrong?

What nobody knew at the time was that Mr. Ocean was a hired actor which job was to produce a scandal. He did!

Demonstration is to perform, to perform not the role of somebody else, but of confidence, consensus or fatherly knowledge. A demonstration is there to acknowledge a position and to produce platforms for exchange. A performance which rhetoric is the opposite of most contemporary theatre, namely to withdraw sensations of doubt, to cross out fear and distance, and to make illusion pass for something else.

(Scene from "Oceans Eleven" – only watch it)

Demonstration: The act of proving by a syllogistic process, or the proof itself; A course of reasoning showing that a certain result is a necessary consequence of assumed premises; -- these premises being definitions, axioms, and previously established propositions.

But what is the difference between Franco B and TV Shop. They do the same: prove by a syllogistic process, the proof itself, late at night.

What's the difference between a perfume salesman on Zeil and Stelarc, nothing except that the salesman has an idea of dramaturgy. The reason why Stelarc needs demonstration is of course because his work doesn't provoke any transformation of time.

The question may arise: " what is it that it is being demonstrated exactly?"

Most probably: Demonstration itself, however Stelarc doesn't know it – even though this is what might just make his work interesting, exactly because it may allow us to, shortly, return to Sade, and propose demonstration as the fundamental motif in the Sadean system, meaning that the Sadic issue is not the demonstration of perversity but the perversity of demonstration.

Modernity is perverse. Structurally perverse, seemingly. Perversion being understood as the subject's drive to become objectified. Still to build up a discourse on perversion you do need a subject, and its objects, and an unfolding relational process.

If art as expression tries to endow objects with subjective qualities, in a quite fetishistic way I might add, Sade provides us with the only other way out of the double binding question of selfness and objecthood: to objectify the subject. That would account for the dark side of the Modern Subject.

If one aims at describing contemporary artistic procedures, one should be aware of how thoroughly the artistic has been infected with the technical. Meaning that, regardless of any given specific media one might be using, one has always already stepped out of art as

Modernistic *presentation* into a somewhat motiveless notion of *performance*; meaning, the demonstration of the artistic devices turned into display.

The problem with demonstrative procedures, however, is that demonstration cannot bring about anything except more demonstration. Thus, excluding any possibility of "becoming". Thus, assuming the "future" as already there, as a mere actualization of the present. We can take it from Heidegger and

his view on the essence of technology as "en-framing"; what is at stake is that through a technological procedure of producing the "actual", the whole of the "potential" is, always, already, inscribed.

I here would like to reference Ed Harris film "Pollock" where we see Pollock performed by Ed Harris first of all, as if on a mission from God, being virginally fertilized with the drip technique and shortly after performing the technique, as demonstration.

Pollock is not the last romantic hero of the arts, he is rather the perverse subject demonstrating demonstration, perfecting the protocol to substitute for his impotence, and hence logically forced to suicide.

"I would like to start by thanking..."

(Make the speech from "Intolerable Cruelty" – show the segment of the film)

Indeed why do one visit a lecture, by e.g. a philosopher, literary theorist, or these slideshows in a community house about somebody going by canoe to Dakar. The first answer must be, to acquire knowledge, but normally what is said in a lecture is also what is argued in a resent publication – Frankfurt has his own master in Hans Thies Lehmann -, and even if it isn't when academics lecture they tend to back off and become defensive cowards.

Panel debates are, I think common knowledge, just a waste of time as long as it is not assembled because of political turbulence, which simply makes it a farce (but at least its fun). It is thus more likely that we visit lectures to see the person behind the books, to see the show, to follow the spectacle of discourse, or when we are in a bad mode to make sure it's as bad as we desired. It's of course kind of cool to have been there – "I saw a talk in Barcelona 98, that was so quantum leap in thought": thus lecture of anecdotes become the anecdote of lectures.

Something remarkable. How seldom one experience lectures, or people speaking in front of an audience, where it makes a difference, where somebody made an effort to not just read a text, to make pictures that says something more than: I also have some pictures, or found out his/her way of address. It's not so difficult to figure out, rhetoric being perhaps our oldest academic field, that the way you speak is the turning point of success. And still why do the audience have to suffer lecturers where slides, powerpoint presentations, manuscripts, whiteboards, video projectors, curtains, tapes, pencils everything manage to fail in the same very second, including a great cold, totally bad dress-code, dry mouth, spilling the water, the amphora crushing onto the floor, making it 2 hours instead of 25 minutes in very bad *I will give my lecture in the English language*. Well, it certainly matters what one says but when said in a lousy way the work is undone, which of course doesn't imply that there is only one way to proceed.

The most exiting example being, something rather common in the medical field – It happens that I worked as an assistant for a professor in physiotherapy for five years and during these years spent rather some time in medical conferences, where I several times encountered researchers giving talks on what literature they were issuing for their upcoming research project. They gave talk on their references. This is so contemporary.

In 1997 Pierre Bourdieu published "On Television" where he argues that contemporary media produce a new kind of scientist, one that has 30 seconds to present his field; that has to have a catch phrase ready for every question. If you're not made of fast forward argumentation you're a failed sci-

entist, seems to be the result. Our question is perhaps: what can science learn from performance, dramaturgy and perhaps even dance, to make one's statements efficient, or not, in the milieu at hand.

The interest in the I-was-there-bicycle-to-Tibet-kind-of-lecture offers something different. Here it is all about spectacle, making the speaker an adventurer or even discoverer. The audience expects the performer to catch us, to take us with him/her to a land beyond our everyday life. There might not be such a difference between this kind of lecture and a performance where the actor tells the audience about his/her childhood, the making of a show, or memories from another time. Whether the political implications are of any difference is interesting to think about but I personally vote for the I-was-in-Tibet.

Recently we have in performance studies conferences and festivals seen a new kind of lecture surface, where *lecture as performance* also is addressed. As I say *what I am now saying I also perform that being said...* and so on informed by J. L. Austin with accompaniment. We have likewise seen performances in the shape of lectures. There is however something of a problem in this field of presentations. If the anthropologist shows up with a bone through his/her nose, I guess it's fine, as well as when Mr Business fluffs up his talk with a kitschy powerpoint presentation where diagrams fly in from all over the place. It after all stays pure effect, no more no less than when décor is on an enter/exit basis of every 30 seconds. However, when the performance studies person starts setting up a space in an unconventional way, or wearing his pants back-side-front or performing the boundaries of speech, it instead poses a consciousness of performance/tivity which however does not, as far as I can remember, transport anything else than exactly this consciousness, i.e. show off. For a performative element to make any sense it's information has to cross speech in an additive manner, not in respect of difference of degree but of kind, thus undermining the position of the lecturer him/her self. This position is of course not wished for just because of a lack of hierarchy. When a performance instead is turned into lecture, still being presented in a performance frame, the use of lecture becomes a metaphor which undermines not only the position of the performer but also the that of the gaze. What, e.g. *Product of Circumstances* by Xavier Le Roy, is it that I am watching: a dance, a lecture, a performance, I-was-in-Tibet, or even a promotion show for the artist in front of us. Indeed the problematic posed by Xavier Le Roy is this very negotiation, plus the fact that he radically questions the notion of production of discourse as lecture: Was he ever a biologist?

Through this undermining of frames Xavier Le Roy also questions the way we conventionally address a (dance)performance. Because of course we know that, when he says "This image we skip for now...", we also know that he has said that every evening with the same ontology as the Ghost returns in Hamlet.

Finally. To lecture is a kind of ritual, with footnotes and all. Where some guy is about to deceive us that it will rain tomorrow, or that it's a great idea to this or that. To give a lecture is to perform, to perform is to stage one self, to stage one self implies to offer a biography.

(Scene from "Catch me if you can")

Over the last ten years lecture performance has become a format, shifting its meaning over the years yet, establishing a format.

The early 90s used lecture as a metaphor deviating notions of theatre, a texture imposed onto the conventions of theatre making protocols of display visible, much in the same way as visual art emphasized display with artists such as Koons, Steinberger or later Fleury. The worst parts coinciding with the vulgar writing of Jean Baudrillard, where it all comes down to simulation. It's not a miracle

that I attended a conference with Ron Athey, Annie Sprinkle, Fakir Mousafar – all demonstration artists – and Baudrillard in 1996.

The later 90s used lecture/performance in respect of self-staging. If performance and dance issued identity in a Foucault-dian manner in the early 90s, the second half of the 90s confronted this volatile body with notions of appearance. Not only is my body a site of inscription but the enacting of it as well. In other words what is the politics of self-staging. Product of Circumstances address exactly this questions: what is the reliability of discourse performed by a certain individual in a certain context. This to a large extent coinciding with the proliferation of relational aesthetics in the visual art. The address shifts from display to dispositif, and the reference from Foucault to Deleuze, to make it simple.

This development, however, seems to have deviated due the staging of September 11. This mis en scene, brought two discourses, a sentimental one which aim was a recuperation of authenticity or autonomy, and one which instead addressed how this radically new form of intrusion of the nation state, made clean house with notions of self-staging, instead what I today see is at stake is how the relation between security and site is being staged. The reference was changed from Deleuze to Agamben.

In “The Righth Stuff” the president can not live with a failed trip to the moon, but stage a successful moon landing. The world was real and the moon could stay a mis en scene, today it seems the rules has been changed around. Today we use the moon as reference when we, our society, stage the world.

Today it’s not a matter of passing for **something** else (the market passing for art or vise versa), not to pass for **somebody** else (staging the arbitrary appearance of politics, activism or art).

The new cool is to pass for **somewhere** else.

As Renate Selack once said: If you have no questions that’s fine. Because we know that the questions in such a frame is two things. Either somebody wants to nail me, or to show off. Which is one and the same.