



TRACING
CREATION



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1 / IN THE BEGINNING...

Introducing “Tracing Creation”

The beginning is the most important part
of the work.

– Plato, *The Republic* (ca. 380 BC)

What we call the beginning is often the end.
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.

– T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding* (1942)

It has long been believed that live performance only takes place in the sheer now of its staging. Performance is an event that *happens* in front of an audience, which has gathered to witness a singular occasion that can never be repeated twice, at least not in any exact manner as it once has been.

Performance requires the embodied presence of both actors and spectators, and bodies are living entities that breathe, feel, think, sweat, absorb, react, and which are therefore never the same. The conditions of performance, so it was thought, are subject to the passing of time, making it seem as if the event evaporates from the moment it passes by.

In recent years, however, the predominant belief in the ephemerality of performance has been challenged both by artists and scholars, who increasingly recognize how even live art is never entirely “present,” since it is always already embedded in a cultural context that bears the embodied and mediatized traces of its own histories. In spite of its transient appearance, the temporality of performance is, by necessity, convoluted and more complex than it might seem at first sight. Performance takes part in what Jacques Derrida has called a spectral time (1994), in which the past continues to haunt, ineluctably, what we consider to be the present. Similarly, performance is an instance of the “longue durée” or “long duration,” as envisioned by Henri Bergson (1922) or Fernand Braudel (1958), who both aimed to show that time consists of a simultaneity of moments, both past and present, even though we tend to perceive them as distinct, successive instants. Or, one could also say that performance installs what Harry Harootunian (2007), following Husserl, terms a “thickened present,” in which past, present, and future intertwine, undoing the singularity of the chronological understanding of time we have inherited from modernity. The increased interest in the temporality of performance has been a timely defiance of the persistent, if not dogmatic, belief in its evanescent existence, resulting in various explorations of performance’s manifold *afterlives*.

While these efforts have been tremendously valuable, there is nevertheless one essential aspect that still seems to escape attention and which we could describe as the *pre-life* of performance. Since the allegedly natural habitat of performance is the stage, we tend to forget that, before it is even possible to show the work, a gamut of complex processes of thinking, creating, imagining, revising, cutting, rethinking, adjusting already took place – each of which are equally essential to performance’s coming-into-being. This tendency to focus on the performance piece as it is eventually presented leaves out the creative labour that happened *before* its actual showing.

The Stakes of Genetic Research

The international conference “Tracing Creation” calls for closer attention to those preparatory stages that are decisive for the work as it appears on stage, but which often only tacitly inform it. If performance exceeds the “present” moment of its presentation and engages with different times, memories, or traces, it is also crucial to take into account the creative processes that coagulate in a piece we come to know as “the” performance. In this sense, “Tracing Creation” not only supports, but also intends to expand the relatively young research domain of the so-called “genetic study” of the performing arts (e.g. Grésillon and Thomasseau 2005; Féral 2008). This emerging branch in theatre, dance, and performance studies adopts a scholarly tradition that has a longer history. Especially in literary studies, genetic research on author manuscripts is a well-established approach that aspires to gain a deeper understanding of given works by scrutinizing the different versions that chart how it came into being (e.g. Deppmann et al. 2004; Van Hulle 2008). Yet, while genetic studies in literature might be an important inspiration for performance research, there is no doubt that there are other methods and models required for studying the genesis of performance.

Performance’s being resides not so much in its purportedly ephemeral nature, but rather in its inclination to originate from different sources and to spread out over various media. The dispersive dynamics of performance leads, as Christopher Bedford suggests, to an “extended trace history” that could, perhaps, best be described as a “viral ontology” (2012, 78). The image of performance as a virus that circulates and, by the same gesture, proliferates and multiplies seems particularly well fit for a conference on genetic research, even if its meaning shifts when applied to the performing arts. In common parlance, genetics primarily refers to scientific investigations of genes, of those cellular processes that incessantly change and which turns not only us, humans, but also animals, plants, and matter in general into

living beings, whether consciously or not. From a “viral” perspective, then, performance’s coming-into-being can never be traced along the lines of a linear chronology, neither as it can be reduced to a singular source from which a certain creation springs. Instead, performance spills, in the double meaning of the word: continuously spilling over in a variety of people, objects, and moments that are all involved in the event of performance, it becomes a messy practice that cannot do without spilling. Quite rightly, Matthew Reason speaks of “the detritus of live performance” (2003), which evokes how performance can be conspicuously excessive in its creative means, making it all the more difficult to “trace its creation.”

Performance poses deep challenges to the attempt to grasp and understand its “pre-life.” Yet it seems to be essential to probe how this life proceeds, develops, and lingers on – from its varied beginnings to its continued existence. We are currently only at the cusp of what promises to grow into a fundamental perspective that complements existing methodologies in performance, theatre, and dance studies. There is still much work to do in finding out how we can develop the frameworks, vocabulary, and conceptual tools that are flexible yet precise enough to gain insight into artistic processes that often escape the artist’s own understanding. Rather than rigid categorizations or stifling terminologies, it is paramount to strive for approaches that are both open-ended and tailor-made, that is, cut to the size of specific artistic practices as well as inciting further thought on the broader meaning of given procedures in our present cultural climate, in which efficiency often prevails over the time and patience required in the arts.

The Traces of “Tracing Creation”

As any other conference, “Tracing Creation” aspires to leave its traces, amongst the people who participated, in the memories they take back home with them, as well as in the documents that are created before, during, and perhaps also after the event. This book of abstracts is one of these traces. Its primary purpose is, of course, to guide you throughout the conference. But, who knows, in a few years, you might be picking it up out of a box one day, leafing through the pages and remembering who was present, which issues were discussed, what kind of panel you were in, or anything else that may come across your mind. You might even retrieve some notes you made in the margins, inscribing something you did not want to forget at the time and which, perhaps, left an enduring but faint mark in your memory. We hope you will carry this document along with you, both during and after the conference, as a trace of “Tracing Creation.”

Timmy De Laet

2 / WELCOME TO “TRACING CREATION”

Luk Van den Dries

The international conference “Tracing Creation” is a unique event, not only for the many people who have helped organizing it and for all attendees who have travelled – in some cases, from quite far away – in order to participate, but also for the field of performance, theatre, and dance studies as such. “Tracing Creation” intends to provide a platform – or, rather, a breeding ground – for a tendency that has been slowly but steadily emerging and which deserves proper attention. Only in recent years, the genetic study of performance has started to flourish, which is fairly astonishing, given that acquiring knowledge on creative processes is crucial for understanding the eventual work. Therefore, we consider it timely and necessary to foster a genetic perspective on the performing arts and to facilitate discussion, amongst scholars as well as artists, on the potentialities, objectives, and requirements of this research domain.

The primary initiative for “Tracing Creation” comes from a collaborative, four-year research project, conducted at the University of Antwerp and the Vrije Universiteit Brussels. Under the title of “The Didascalic Imagination,” a team of researchers has joined forces in attempting to establish performance genetics as a valuable, if not indispensable, approach to study the performing arts by focusing specifically on director’s notebooks as a means to gain insight into the creative processes of theatrical production. The notebook can be considered an emblem of performance’s genesis, insofar as it charts the bits and scraps, the cutting and pasting, the thinking and imagining that coincide with any artistic process. In developing this research, “The Didascalic Imagination” has been able to connect with other scholars who shared similar concerns, most notably the FIRT/IFTR Working Group *Processus de creation*, convened by Josette Féral and Sophie Proust. Yet, even though the international network of scholars concerned with genetic studies in the performing arts is currently expanding, conferences specifically devoted to this topic are fairly exceptional. Certainly in Belgium, this event is the first one of its kind. “Tracing Creation” offers a momentum to bring together these internationally connected interests together.

Undoubtedly, acknowledgement is growing that a thorough understanding of what happens on stage can greatly benefit from analyzing those processes that take place before, beside, or even behind it. However, as this is a relatively new research domain, there is a pressing need to develop solid

methodologies that can enhance the genetic study of the performing arts. “Tracing Creation” brings together more than 50 speakers from different places all over the world, who will present their research in 16 plenary sessions. As such, the conference provides a great and much-needed opportunity to share knowledge and to discuss major issues and challenges of genetic studies.

Next to providing a meeting ground for different approaches, methodological questions, individual case studies, the “Tracing Creation”-committees envision the conference as an interplay of theory and practice. Sharing knowledge is also an artistic endeavor, which is why we deliberately aim to open up the floor to the voice of artists. They will give an inside view on how they look at their creation process, showing a sample of their sketches, scrapbooks, notes, et cetera and giving a glimpse of how their artistic imagination works.

On behalf of the Organizing Committee, I would like to thank deSingel - International Arts Campus and the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp for their collaboration in hosting this event. My profound thanks also go to our several valuable partners: CLIC (Centre for Literary and Intermedial Crossings / VUB), S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts & Media / Ghent University), Lira (Laboratoire International de Recherche en Arts / Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3), UQÀM (Université du Québec à Montréal), the Flemish Government, and the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO). The Conference Committees and I personally are thankful for everyone’s support in making “Tracing Creation” possible.

It is our greatest pleasure to welcome you at “Tracing Creation” and it is our sincerest hope that you will enjoy your participation in the conference.

3 / COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

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7 / CURATING THE NOTEBOOK

Genetic research is closely connected to artistic practice, which is why “Tracing Creation” features a new format: “Curating the Notebook.” Each conference day, an artist will talk about his practice and more specifically about his creative methods and the material documents (drawings, notes, sketches, etc.) that are generated while creating. A second person joins in, as an interlocutor who, out of curiosity, asks a few questions and assists in disclosing the work. These talks promise to provide unique insight in the creative imagination of some of our leading artists.

CURATING THE NOTEBOOK 1

Wednesday 9 March 2016 (16h30-18h00)

BENJAMIN VERDONCK & SARA JANSEN

BIOGRAPHIES

Benjamin Verdonck is an actor, theatre maker, author and visual artist. He is currently supported by Toneelhuis (Antwerp) and KVS (Brussels). In 2009, he was the recipient of the Flemish Culture Prize for the Performing Arts. He has created a large number of performances, including *Hirondelle/Dooi Vogeltje/The Great Swallow* (a human-sized swallow's nest attached to a building at a height of 32 meters), *nine finger* (with Fumiyo Ikeda and Alain Platel), *Misschien wisten zij alles* (by Toon Tellegen, with Willy Thomas), *Calendar 2009* (365 days of actions in Antwerp), and *notallwhowanderarelost* (tabletop theater). In addition, he published the books *Werk/Some Work* and *Kalendar 09*. His visual work has been shown at Wiels (Brussels), M HKA (Antwerp) en S.M.A.K (Gent). <http://benjamin-verdonck.be>

Sara Jansen is a researcher and dramaturg in dance. She holds degrees in Japanese Studies (KU Leuven) and Performance Studies (New York University), and was a Japan Foundation Fellow at Waseda University. Currently, she is completing a joint PhD at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Universiteit Antwerpen (Theatre Studies and Intermediality), and affiliated with the research project “The Didascalical Imagination” (UA, VUB). She has collaborated on dance productions by, among others, Rosas/Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker, Fumiyo Ikeda and Tim Etchells, fieldworks/Yukiko Shinozaki and Heine Avdal, and Trajal Harrell.

Thursday 10 March 2016 (16h30-18h00)

JAN FABRE & LUK VAN DEN DRIES

BIOGRAPHIES

Jan Fabre started his career in fine arts and theatre from 1976. His eight-hour performance *It Is Theatre as was to be Expected and Foreseen* (1982) launched his international reputation. Since the 1980s, his pioneering work crossed the borders of theatre, dance and performance art. He developed a theatrical language that is, in the first place, built on physicality. Greatly inspired by the use of real time/real action in performance art, he creates theatre from real physicality on stage. His most important work to date is *Mount Olympus – To glorify the cult of tragedy* (2015), a 24 hour performance in which all his obsessions with presence, transformation, time and extase culminate. Jan Fabre is also a major theatre author and multi-disciplinary artist famous for his drawings and sculptures. Important solo-exhibitions include *Homo Faber* (KMSK, Antwerp, 2006), *Hortus/Corpus* (Kröller Müller, Otterlo, 2011) en *Stigmata* (MAXXI, Rome, 2013). He was invited, as the first living artist, at The Louvre Museum with the exhibition *The Angel of Metamorphosis* (2008). In 2016 he will have an exhibition in the State Hermitage Museum (St-Petersburg).

Luk Van den Dries is Full Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). His research deals with contemporary postdramatic theatre, representations of the body and the dynamics between director's notebooks and rehearsal processes. He is co-supervisor of the research project "The Didascalical Imagination" (funded by FWO-Research Foundation Flanders). He wrote extensively on Jan Fabre, one of the main examples of postdramatic theatre in Flanders, and works as a freelance dramaturge for him. He was editor of the theatre magazine *Etcetera*, organiser of the Flemish-Dutch Theatre festival, president of the jury of the Flemish-Dutch Theatre festival and president of the Flemish Arts Council. He co-founded a:pass, the postgraduate academy in theatre, and the arts centre for upcoming theatre artists in Antwerp De Theatermaker. Together with Louise Chardon he founded the production company AndWhatBesidesDeath.

Friday 11 March 2016 (16h00-17h30)

ROMEO CASTELLUCCI & ELENİ PAPALEXIOU

BIOGRAPHIES

Romeo Castellucci was born in 1960 in Cesena, Italy. He graduated with a degree in painting and scenography from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna. In 1981, jointly with Claudia Castellucci and Chiara Guidi, he founded Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Since then he has produced numerous plays in the role of author, director and creator of scenes, lights, sound and costumes. He is known all over the world and his works have been presented in more than fifty different countries. As an author of theater based on the totality of the arts, aimed at creating an integral perception, he has also written various essays on the theory of directing plays. His directing is characterized by dramatic lines that are not subject to the primacy of literature, but rather make of theater a plastic, complex art, rich with visions. This has developed a comprehensible language in the same way that music, sculpture, painting and architecture can be. His plays are regularly invited and produced by the most prestigious theaters and festivals all over the world. In 2013 Romeo Castellucci received the “Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement” from La Biennale Teatro di Venezia.

Eleni Papalexiou is a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Studies, School of Fine Arts, University of the Peloponnese (Nafplion), where she teaches contemporary theatre, theatre theory and performance analysis. She holds a Ph.D. on contemporary approaches of Greek tragedy from the Université Sorbonne Paris IV. She is the author of a monograph entitled *When the words turn into matter* on the theatre of Romeo Castellucci and the Societas Raffaello Sanzio (Plethron, 2009) and she has published several articles, such as: « Nyx Teleia. Nella notte profonda del mondo greco antico », in *Toccare il reale: L'arte di Romeo Castellucci* (2015); « The Dramaturgies of the Gaze: Strategies of Vision and Optical Revelations in the Theatre of Romeo Castellucci and the Societas Raffaello Sanzio », in *Theatre as Voyeurism: The Pleasures of Watching* (2015), and « Le corps comme matière dramatique dans le théâtre de Romeo Castellucci », *Utopie et pensée critique dans le processus de création* (2012). She was the main researcher of the research project “Archivio” (2012–2013) and is currently a member of the main research team of the European project “Arch: Archival Research and Cultural Heritage-Aristeia II” (2014 to today), both concerning the theatre archive of Societas Raffaello Sanzio. Recently the archive was declared of major historical interest and importance by the Italian Ministry of Culture. As a Fulbright visiting scholar she conducted re-

search at Stanford University (Department of Classics & Department of Theater and Performance Studies, 2014-2015).

www.arch-srs.com

*The session 'Curating the Notebook 3' also includes contributions from:
Avra Xepapadakou (documentation consultant)
Stathis Athanasiou (audiovisual editing)*

8 / EVENING PERFORMANCES

TIM ETCHELLS

A Broadcast / Looping Pieces
Wednesday 9 March 2016 (20h00)
deSingel – Zwarte Zaal

A Broadcast / Looping Pieces is an improvised text and performance work by Tim Etchells. It has been presented in a number of different contexts – sometimes as an hour-long performance in theatre spaces to a seated audience, and sometimes as shorter fragments in a gallery or other settings, with more mobile or informally constituted audiences.

The improvised core of the work is a live remixing by Etchells of pages from his notebook – in fact a chaotic accumulating Word file in which the artist has, for many years, gathered fragments of text, ideas, overheard conversation, cut-and-paste-excerpts from newspaper articles and web pages, writings, drafts, quotations and other notes. Selecting passages from this textual scrapbook Etchells winds, intercuts, weaves and collides language – frequently looping and repeating on individual lines, at other times editing and re-writing on the fly, creating dialogues, juxtapositions and ambiguous collisions.

Exploring archive, the process of writing and gathering, *A Broadcast / Looping Pieces* is an improvised window on Etchells' approaches to text, exploring creative process, and the transformative power of performance itself.

Romeo Castellucci and the Societas Raffaello Sanzio

Oresteia (an Organic Comedy?)
Thursday 10 March 2016 (20h00)
deSingel – Rode Zaal

Twenty years after the creation of *Oresteia*, the Italian master Romeo Castellucci is paring one of his iconic works down to its essence. He turns the struggle between the divine and the human into unforgettable scenic images of glacial beauty. Castellucci takes you off to a place somewhere between dream, hallucination and reality.

9 / COLOFON

Tracing Creation: Genetics, Genes, and Genealogies is organised by
the Research Centre for Visual Poetics of the University of Antwerp



in collaboration with CLIC / Vrije Universiteit Brussel – LIRA / Université
Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3 – Theatre Department / Université du Québec
à Montréal – S:PAM / Ghent University – Royal Conservatoire Antwerp /
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