"Passive constructions : Theater Miniatur"
(Seven parts, Berlin, October 2008, SophiensAEle, Virchowsaal)

Suddenness and shock, these were supposed to be the sailing elements of modern esthetic strategy.  With the academic rule-books becoming by and by out of use, elements such as the immediate impact, the "dent", the effect were coming more and more to the fore. Artistic positions were enhanced by their immediacy in the moment of perception rather than by the technical, compositional or meditative aspects of a work of art.

This is roughly true for any genre, but without doubt and in particular for the performing arts. The great experimental revues of the 20ies and of course the numerous variants of modern dance from Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan to Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert focused on the overwhelming immediacy of their artistic expressions. The stage was for them an appropriate place to visualize new strategies of presence, to show and put into their context bodies both in their intricate biological being and as cultural artifacts.

These issues are far from fully settled in contemporary art, but the esthetical patterns have changed in the meanwhile. They feature more variants, they transgress the borders of genre, and they surmount what is always virulent in vanguard and audacious forms:  self-criticism and the struggle with the own medium; instead, the modern patterns try to find new levels of construction.

In her recent essay on "Danse et philosophie. Une pensée en construction" (Paris: l'Harmattan 2007), Véronique Fabbri traces this kind of processes. She refers to Walter Benjamin's theory of languague ("Problem der Sprachsoziologie"). There as well as in his study on "Der Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels" ,  the subject is the continuous slipping-away  of substance in acts of "event" and "communication": "Construction and analysis shift the accent away from the event itself  to things which have vanished but however maintain a glimmer of their original significance" (Fabbri 2007, p. 43). Consequently, the correlation between 'sensual experience' and language remains undetermined (Benjamin discusses this above all as a problem of names): "the main problem is to see how reality is sensuously present in language" (Fabbri 2007, p. 49).

The constructive and in a way "auto-poietic" element in modern art is not only present in new materials or mindsets, for instance in architecture, but also in the way of thinking itself. The dynamics of negation and discontinuity which have essentially motivated modern trends, are hence getting a dialectically colored turn. Paul Klee writes in 1928: "Any denial and any negation have only a reason to be if they give the foil for the drawing of the vivid, of the positive" (cf. Paul Klee, "Exakter Versuch im Bereich der Kunst"; Zeitschrift für Gestaltung, Dessau 1928).

The vivid as a constructive element finds its place on the stage. The stage is the site of performative art where nothing comes into being unless it happens

and unless it is created. Hence the stage is the location of the passive voice: the stage is enlivened, it is animated. It would however be strange to conceive theatre and the stage only as a "locus" of self-denial or insulation, where the active voice of representation is only possible via the passive voice of the performative. In that case the stage would become a place for the mere building of realities under certain rules.  And precisely these rules are under a constant scrutiny in the vanguard environment of  "heroic modern art". Everything surrenders to the suggestive effects of subdual, of poly-media and of overabundance, and self-outbidding becomes a program in itself.

These perfunctory comments may lead to a closer look at an experiment that goes in the opposite direction.

"Theaterminiatur" by David Weber-Krebs and Alexander Schellow avoids in two ways a surrender to the exaggerations of the prevailing art business: One the one hand, they employ a minimum of suggestive means, e.g. by  staging the performance for one spectator only; on the other hand, they succeed in allying the dimensions of image and of representation.

"Theaterminiatur" interweaves - constructs - a number of layers of performative art and thereby creates in a puzzling way an inchoate area for our associations and perceptions.  The different parts of the performance could be called "modules", as they are separate and self-supporting entities which refer to each other  both in substance and in style, but one does not need to know all of them. In these modules literally emerges an area of occurrence which expands into two directions: the constructed room of the stage - theatre as the setting for visibleness VISIBILITY ??- and the inner room of apperception which allows the interweaving of impressions and associations.

In turn, this aspect of self-assessment and self-positioning is again integrated into the visible part of the performance. The stage for the seven modules is basically identical. Its central element is a monitor on which video sequences are projected. The central feature of the different modules is text, created by writers coming from various backgrounds (criminology KRIMIAUTORIN, script, theatre, sociology). Their messages, whether spoken or written, find therefore easily their way into the centre of the visible. By the same token, the messages become a sensuous part of the performance's momentum. It is with its senses that the creative situation of the performance adopts the reality of the text - in other words, "reality appears sensuously present in the text".

As is the case with any media-based content, these video parts tie the attention up in a peculiar way. Particularly in the form of tapes or text sequences, our in-born cultural constraint to read gives us an additional impetus. In one case, this ambivalence between medial captivation and the free alertness of mind is itself the topic of the module. The author has "minuted" her sublimated impression of what happened, and this record becomes in turn the subject of her Miniature.

"Theaterminiatur" consists, as all other modular systems, essentially of change, adaptation and revisal. The configuration of the different modules, their number, their sequence and their impact do not follow a particular or pre-established code, but are basically coincidental. Each spectator chooses the module he wants to see and, tellingly, he makes his choice based on the name of the respective author. The entire project is again, grammatically speaking, in the passive voice and in the reflexive form, since the user decides in which way the given material is carried out, expresses itself, comes into being.

Inbuilt in this overall appearance, there are however a number of complex and pre-meditated elements of concealment, of visualisation, and of appeals to the senses. The video sequences have sometimes a milky or nebulous color, others feature murmuring and observative sounds; they are often at the limit of visual perception. The stage as a parameter of action and of objects is diluted and becomes an area which could be interpreted both in a graphical and in a theatrical way.

The setting of the stage is rather unattractive for the senses: an austere and almost dark room, a chair facing a diagonally fixed, half open box. It is made of flooring devices and gives the impression of an esthetic corrugation, of a "constructive warp". The spectator's chair is placed on the "dance floor" and the rest of the ground is covered with rough screed. In this austere environment, the reception is friendly but matter-of-fact. The spectator receives a few instructions: e.g. that he may well rise from his chair and walk around. Then the elements of the module are presented at random: sounds, background noises, scarce scenic actions or rather: incidents. All this is strikingly impalpable, fading-out, nearly whispering. Even when human figures appear, this happens at the limit of hallucination, of visual illusion, of make-believe. This composition of sensuous elements and un-sensuous representation can give no guarantee for the intrinsic reality of what presents itself with a generous gesture as "Miniatur". But despite all this minimalism and reduction there is virtually always somebody around. Not so much the actresses PERFORMERS ?? who with minimal actions open "side-shows", e.g. by leading one's eyes with a mirror or by leaving the room ostentatiously. Human presence is rather created by the act of writing conveyed to, and the way of positioning the pictures on, the screen. The monitor becomes the real point of attention where the senses might converge at any moment.

Sometimes one would only perceive some clicking noises, produced by the amplified sound of water-drops from a tap which has been activated by a computer. These noises appear playful and incidental, as do the images of mist which sometimes foreshadow a landscape, sometimes remain plain grey. In between there are words, presented partly on a conveyor or in sub-titles, partly as a text-block with - for the spectator - the mandate to read even if the text runs too fast. The act of reading, the creation of significance in the gesture of reading become a mere apperception among others.

"Theaterminiatur" is the construction of a room for sensuous transfers, offering a great number of possibilities create the impression of a meaning, of obviousness, even of immediacy by artfully interweaving the precious.

Art, in particular performing art, comes as the creation of reality via the artificial. The Performative is the appearance of the sensual as something inchoate, find its form only in percpetive acts. The form may be pre-conceived, but avoids any exaggeration or rhetoric.

The absence of rhetorics and actionism, which leads to a space open for creative encounters, is probably the most touching feature of this project which interweaves layers of surface, volume and artistic performance under the auspices of the post-actional art.

*Franz Anton Cramer.*